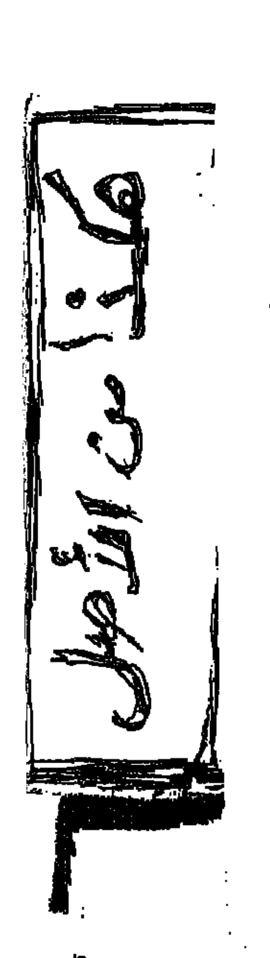


The Guardian Weekly

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Week ending January 21, 1996



Full-scale assault batters Chechens

James Meek near Pervomayskaya, Dagestan, David Hearst and agencies

RUSSIAN forces battered this Caucasus village with rockets and artillery on Tuesday in new efforts to end a hostage crisis which threatens to further undermine President Boris Yeltsin.

Russian security officials said 23 out of about 100 hostages had been released in the 24 hours since Moscow launched an all-out assault on Chechen guerrillas in Pervomayskaya on Monday morning.

The fate of the other captives held by Salman "Lone Wolf" Raduyev and about 100 remaining fighters was unknown.

Russia's Interior Ministry said about 60 rebels had been killed and 15 wounded while the Russian side had four dead and 14 wounded.

In a move which could further complicate the crisis, 30 people were seized in breakaway Chechenia, the rebels' homeland.

Moscow said the hostages had been snatched early on Tuesday at an electrical plant on the edge of the Chechen capital Grozny. Most of them were not Chechens.

Mr Yeltsin, eager not to look weak at the opening of the new State Duma, the lower house of parliament, said the operation had become necessary after the rebels shot two of their hostages — Interior Ministry troops — and negotiations had failed. The Chechens denied this.

Many Russians blame Mr Yeltsin for the Chechenia conflict in which up to 30,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since he sent in soldiers in December 1994 to crush the region's independence bid.

For the Chechen separatist movement — led by Mr Raduyev's father-in-law, General Dzhokhar Dudayev — the choice of a border post in neighbouring Dagestan as the scene of confrontation with Russia was probably not accidental.

Mr Raduyev and his fighters ended up there after fighting in the Dagestani town of Kizlyar on January 9 when they seized a hospital and 2,000 captives. They had originally planned to attack the military airfield in Kizlyar because they believed a consignment of rockets for use in Chechenia was to be unloaded there.

Taking the hospital was a reserve plan they put into effect when a number of fighters were badly wounded and needed surgery.

The Chechens released most of their hospital captives the following day after supposedly reaching a deal guaranteeing them safe passage to Chechenia, at which point they promised to release the rest.

But the convoy of buses carrying them and their hostages, including women and children, was fired on with rockets from a Russian helicopter just as it was leaving Pervomayskaya, only a few hundred metres from the Chechen border.

The Chechens ordered the convoy to turn back and they quickly took over the village, capturing 37 Interior Ministry troops and an arsenal of weapons. Most of the 500 or so villagers fled.

Dagestan is a loose patchwork of 40 ethnic minorities, all of which jockey for position. This precarious balance of rival nationalities could easily be upset by the Russian troops firing on the hostages.

Mr Dudayev's tactics are clever. If the hostage-taking had succeeded, as the operation against the southern Russian town of Budyonnovsk did last year, it would have struck a grave blow to Moscow's authority. If it fails, the death of people from other North Caucasian ethnic groups will ignite a fuse setting off parallel explosions. Either way, he wins.

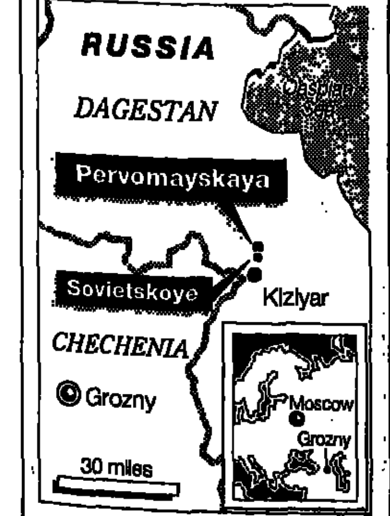
Dagestan is a key route for weapons for Mr Dudayev's fighters from the Islamic lands through Azerbaijan and up into the North Caucasus. To continue the war, Mr Dudayev's fighters need chaos in neighbouring states.

One recent study of Russia's problems in the area concluded: "The North Caucasus is a tinderbox where a conflict in one republic has the potential to spark a regional conflagration that will spread beyond its borders into the rest of the Russian Federation."

In the Caucasus, Mr Yeltsin's policy swings have had a disastrous effect. Before rival clans clashed for position, while the state remained the owner. Now they can fight over oil, guns and land.

In this election year, Mr Yeltsin, who only returned to office last month after a second heart attack in October, cannot afford to lose control or the tinderbox fire could well spread to Moscow.

Before the fighting started, Mr Raduyev told journalists: "We do not care how we die."



Comment, page 12

Bound by law . . . The policy of shackling pregnant women and this HIV-positive remand prisoner while in hospital has sparked disbelief that such treatment exists in Britain

Protests force UK prisons to end policy of chaining pregnant women to hospital beds

Alan Travis

THE UK Prison Service is to drop its policy of shackling pregnant women inmates in the final hours before they give birth.

The decision, taken in the wake of protests from doctors and midwives, child welfare experts and MPs, was due to be formally announced later this week.

The disclosures of the humiliation and misery experienced by the chained pregnant prisoners sparked disbelief amongst MPs and the public that such practices could still be employed in the British prison system.

Details of an agreement between the acting head of the Prison Service, Richard Tilt, and the Royal College of Midwives president, Caroline Flint, were still to be finalised on Tuesday. But the agreement is expected to include a "more humane" definition of when a prisoner goes into labour and when chains should be removed.

It is also believed that prison officers will be instructed that they should maintain a guard outside the maternity ward once labour has started, and not remain behind a screen as is the present practice.

The change in policy came as the prisons minister, Ann Widdecombe, was forced to take the unusual step of making a personal statement to the House of Commons to apologise to MPs for incorrectly claiming that the hospital at the centre of the row — the Whittington in London — had not voiced any concerns about the practice. The minister said she had been wrongly advised by the prison service.

The Whittington hospital had first protested about the policy as early as August 31 last year and had followed it up with numerous letters and phone calls to ministers and the prison authorities.

"I deeply regret that the advice which I had been given about this correspondence, and which I in turn gave to the House in all good faith, was wrong, and I offer my unreserved apology to the House," said Miss Widdecombe.

In its turn the Prison Service made a full apology to Miss Widdecombe, saying it only had two hours to provide the information before the Commons emergency question was debated last week.

The shadow home secretary, Jack Straw, said he got the information in one short telephone call to the hospital.

Mr Tilt also said he would personally review the case of the HIV-positive woman prisoner who is shackled 24 hours a day to a prison officer.

On Monday an Old Bailey judge refused a bail application on behalf of the inmate from Holloway prison, north London, known only as Jane, who is on remand in custody for allegedly smuggling four grammes of heroin.

Her solicitor, Sarah Cleary, says she is far too ill to walk more than a couple of hundred yards and would not be an escape risk. "She's fairly seriously ill but being held in unthinkable conditions. She's got tubes coming out of her. She is wearing one handcuff, attached by a very long chain to a prison officer, who wears the other cuff. It's like something out of China."

Mr Tilt said that discretion already existed to unchain inmates if the prison authorities were satisfied that medical conditions were such that there was no risk of escape and security considerations were not paramount.

Austria	AS30	Malta	45c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 400	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30

Ethical bankruptcy of sanctions against Iraq

WHILE dismay in certain circles at the exposure of child deaths in Iraq as a consequence of the economic embargo is understandable, nevertheless the Washington Post editorial (January 7) is breathtaking in its hypocrisy. The argument appears to be that sanctions are blameless — resisting them is the evil.

To condemn Saddam Hussein for not giving in to the sanctions is to profoundly misunderstand the Iraqi character. Let us acknowledge reality. The embargo was intended to hurt and in this, because of the almost single-product economy in Iraq, it has been enormously successful. Sanctions are designed to produce deprivation and poverty. It is not surprising that, in consequence, they bring about widespread malnutrition and increased mortality.

In theory, with sanctions operating quietly in the background, economic distress throughout Iraq will cause a popular uprising and a regime reviled by the West that can be replaced simply and cheaply. The first part is true, and as team leader of the recent UN/FAO mission referred to by the Washington Post, I must emphasise the reality of the disaster in Iraq.

In Iraq, all sectors of society except the power-élite and the new wheeler-dealers are affected; indeed, the whole infrastructure including agriculture is crumbling. Relief activities by both the UN and by NGOs certainly help but the amount provided, compared with the need, is minimal.

The greatest humanitarian relief, however, comes from the government of Iraq itself in providing a daily food ration of some 1,100 kcal (it was 1,600 kcal until 1994) as well as baby milk (about 50 per cent of the needs) for infants, which is almost free of cost. Thus, this is also an enormous income subsidy in the face of hyperinflation and a 5,000-fold increase in food prices.

The prevention of absolute disaster is, however, at the cost of a colossal drain on currency reserves, and the future collapse of such a system cannot be ruled out. In nutritional and health terms, the five years of sanctions have moved Iraq from an almost first-world status to that of sub-Saharan Africa.

Of course, selling of additional oil for humanitarian purposes would alleviate the situation, and in our report we urged the Iraqi government and the Security Council to come to an agreement. Even were this to occur, it could never be a complete solution. Painless sanctions are a contradiction in terms, and child deaths, especially in the poor and vulnerable, are an inevitable consequence of economic pain.

I have seen the effects of the embargo in Iraq both in 1993 and in the summer of 1995 as well as comparing this with the pre-war situation: malnutrition, beggars, crime, street children, a collapsed health care system, hyperinflation and widespread suffering are the new reality.

I cannot believe that continued sanctions are the answer. After five years the policy seems practically and ethically bankrupt. The question must be whether our humanitarian principles should support the continuation of these actions which are literally killing people. The incessant trumpeting of "human rights" at the same time as we continue to approve the sanctions seems to be blatant hypocrisy.

This letter is written on a personal basis and is in no way officially endorsed by the UN nor by the University of Massachusetts.
Peter L Pellett,
Professor of Nutrition and team leader, UN/FAO Mission to Iraq August 1995, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA



Dissident on our conscience

I WONDER whether the Conservatives yet realise how dangerous a precedent they have set by agreeing to Saudi requests to deport Dr al-Mas'ari. If, after the next election, a British prime minister of a different political complexion were to require, say, the government of Australia, to deport "that little creep Portillo for making tiresome political speeches", would British Conservatives now have any legitimate grounds for protest?

What people are allowed to do in Britain is a matter of national sovereignty. If Mr Major does not understand this, he risks being portrayed as "Monsieur Oui — the robot of Riyadh".
Lord Russell,
House of Lords, London

THE al-Mas'ari debate seems to be polarised between the moral and the pragmatic — human rights versus jobs. This is a false distinction. Dr al-Mas'ari deserves the support of those who have an interest in sustaining employment in the engineering industry, of which the defence sector is a major component.

As a trade union official, I dealt with defence companies for over 20 years. I saw them transformed from confident, growing and technologically advanced to worried, redundancy-prone and highly-critical of government defence policy. If the present situation continues, there will be absolutely no job security for those whose careers have been devoted to organisations that are over-dependent on military production.

British Aerospace is 64 per cent defence-dependent; Kawasaki is the most dependent in Japan — but only 16 per cent. The largest German defence company, Daimler-Benz, is 30 per cent dependent. The cold war confrontation is over and there is a glut of arms with too many producers chasing fewer and poorer buyers.

The Challenger 2 tank was developed for the Shah of Iran by Vickers as part of the UK government's support for his unpopular regime. When he was deposed, one of the first actions taken by the new rulers was to cancel the order. Redundancies followed immediately. The future of British industry, and employment, does not lie in placating a corrupt ruling family but in producing alternative products that people want to buy.
Tim Webb,
London

Scaremongering to win voters

PETER REITH'S letter (January 7) epitomises the Australian parliamentary opposition's stance, one of destructive negativism and scaremongering. His sympathy with the workers is designed to aggravate their conditions. It is only now, with an election on the horizon, that the Liberals, while not suggesting that they would improve conditions, have at least pledged that the workers would not be worse off than at present.

The trade unions have become bogy men to the opposition, which is surprising given the relatively small number of Australians who are members. The party makes no reference to the other coteries, professional associations, corporate bodies and the like, without accords and with sufficient power to undermine any government's economic, environmental, social welfare or health policy. As for the strike mentioned by Mr Reith, it was triggered by one such corporate body applying a wages structure based on anti-union discrimination.

Most remarkable of all is the statement that if Mr Keating loses the next election, it will be because of loss of support for Labor: one would have expected him to suggest that it would be through the voters' irresistible attraction to the Liberals.
Caroline Leighton,
Oatley, New South Wales, Australia

True beneficiaries of nuclear power

SADLY the answer to Bill Moyers's question "Why did succeeding governments deceive the citizens on this critical issue for over 25 years?" (January 7) may better explain the sudden demise of the nuclear option for British power generation than his celebration of "the effectiveness of people power".

As he correctly observes, there has never been any doubt that nuclear power is extraordinarily expensive. However, every expense has a beneficiary as well as a bearer. The cost of nuclear power, as with many other great expenses — development of transport infrastructures, weapons systems and the like — has been borne by the public. The beneficiaries have largely been private corporations like those that develop and supply the complex and expensive infrastructure for nuclear power generation.

This situation, well understood in many circles as "public subsidy, private profit", has been far from unusual in Britain and the United States since the second world war.

The privatisation of power generation changes the familiar equation. As owners of power generating companies, institutional shareholders are unlikely to subsidise other private industry by investing in uneconomical research and infrastructure in the way in which an ignorant public has lined private pockets. We are unlikely to see "private subsidy, private profit". It should come as no surprise that the demise of nuclear power coincides with the privatisation of power generation. The citizen, not for the first time, was deceived on this issue because they would have been unlikely to give any government a mandate to shovel public money into private corporations.

Sadly, it is not the lifting of these clouds of ignorance which brings about the demise of nuclear power. Nor has the voice of reason and "people power" been heard. The mechanism in this instance is simply no longer appropriate as a means of channelling public monies into private coffers. But the mechanism remains, not least through foreign and military aid, and defence spending in general.
John Allsopp
Bondi, NSW, Australia

Briefly

THE absurdity of David Wessel's assertion that "English Canada does not exist" (December 3) is neatly illustrated by another article in the same issue, in which a resident of Tatarstan says: "There are Russians who have lived here for 50 or 60 years, were born here, and who can't even say 'thank you' in Tatar."

For "Russians" read "Anglos", for "Tatarstan" read "Quebec", for "Tatar", "French", and you have a thumbnail sketch of English Canada!
Bruce Inksetter,
Rapide-Danseur, Quebec, Canada

WHAT a wonderful opportunity for the Millennium Fund to prove its worth by acquiring Lands End and John O'Groats (In Brief, January 14). It could then, by creating car parks several hundred yards away, return them to their "natural" beauty and make them freely accessible to all.
Ruth Jones,
Feckenham, Redditch, Worcestershire

IF 90 per cent of Brits played the Lottery last week, that is a higher turn-out than in any election I can recall. Would more of the electorate be induced to vote if ballot papers were printed in the form of scratch cards?
Richard Evans,
Winchester, Hampshire

A WOMAN is pronounced dead by her doctor ("Thwarting the grim reaper", January 14). When transferred to the mortuary, she is found still to be living, and medical services hasten to find out what's wrong with her. Shouldn't they be finding out what's wrong with the doctor?
Jim Golcher,
Greens Norton, Towcester

FOLLOWING the ruling by a tribunal in Leeds that Labour's policy of a women-only shortlist for parliamentary seats contravenes the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act (January 14), shall we now see a comparable ruling that all-male shortlists are also illegal?
Dr Hilary Gee,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire

SIR ANDREW McEWEN (December 10), referring to the Princess of Wales's BBC Panorama interview, declares that nobody under 40 cares about "theme park Britain". I think theme park Britain is just fine and has a valid place alongside hi-tech Britain.
William Leigh-Pemberton (aged 31),
Shanghai, China

EUROPE'S single currency will be the Euro. Sceptic shall be its subdivision.
Andrew Kelly
Dreieich, Germany

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Mitterrand 'chose his final day'

Alex Duval Smith in Paris

HE DID not know the hour of his impending death. But François Mitterrand did know the day it would come. He planned it meticulously.

According to Le Monde, the late French president, who died last week from prostate cancer, had asked his doctor two days before how long he would live if he ceased taking medication.

Told he would survive a maximum of three days, the 79-year-old former president reportedly disconnected his drip the same day and refused all drugs except painkillers.

He then asked for the curtains to be drawn in his Paris study and telephoned his executor.

In blue ink on three sheets of writing paper, he detailed instructions for his funeral, which took place in his birthplace, Jarnac, on Thursday last week.

There would be no speeches and no wreaths, just one bouquet of tea-roses and another of irises. And so it was.

Pomp and circumstance . . . Paris on parade for Mitterrand's funeral last week PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN REARDON

Two separate services secured his passage from politics to history in an atmosphere loaded with symbols as powerful as they were contradictory, combining pomp and grandeur with pastoral simplicity.

At a solemn requiem mass in Notre-Dame cathedral, 2,300 people — including 170 heads of state and government — mourned beneath rising incense smoke pierced by shafts of light.

Simultaneously, members of Mitterrand's family and 500 friends attended an identical service in Saint-Pierre, a parish church in Jarnac, his birthplace.

Mitterrand had thought of most things — even that his labrador, Baltic, should travel with his coffin from Paris to Jarnac. But if he had wished to bequeath the image of a great 20th century figure, he needed the unprompted endorsement of another doyen of politics. At Notre-Dame during the Piè Jesu from Fauré's Requiem, the imposing figure of the German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, provided it by crying.

And if France is prepared to accept his links with the Vichy regime, it still likes a happy ending. Danielle Mitterrand provided it in Jarnac by being flanked, at the coffin, by her husband's mistress, Anne Pingeot, and their daughter, Mazarine.

Le Monde, page 19

Row brews over US 'crusade' in Bosnia

Martin Walker in Washington

A SERIOUS row about Bosnia between the United States and its European Nato allies is looming as Washington insists on a more aggressive role in pursuing war criminals and in arming and training Bosnian government forces.

In two recent decisions the US defence secretary, William Perry, has alarmed his European allies in the force implementing the Dayton peace deal by widening US responsibilities in Bosnia.

Mr Perry has authorised US troops to provide facilities for human rights and war crimes investigators, and has also permitted controversial US-sponsored training missions of the Bosnian army to begin in the next two months.

Meanwhile, a key peace accord deadline came under threat when the Bosnian government refused to release Serb prisoners unless 4,000 Muslims were freed.

Retired US servicemen who will train the Bosnian army will next month join the 20,000 US troops. The creeping escalation of US involvement is set to accelerate with the latest Pentagon orders to help in the investigation of war crimes.

"We have no reason to wait," Mr Perry said of the training mission, which Pentagon sources say will cost up to $400 million. The use of retired US officers working for a private company is to minimise official US government involvement.

"If the war crimes tribunal wants to go to Srebrenica and dig up some graves, we'll provide the security," Mr Perry said. His comments were in contrast to the cooler British response to claims that there are mass graves at the Ljubija mine in western Bosnia.

European Nato forces are privately dubious about more aggressive US support for war crimes inquiries and its readiness to arm the Bosnians.

"Either way we have a problem," one European diplomat in Washington said. "If the US restricts its support for war crimes researchers to its own zone, then people can drive a wedge between the US and the allies. Neither France nor Britain are too keen to have their own sectors complicated by an American war crimes crusade."

The most delicate areas, Pale and Sarajevo, are in the French sector, and the Ljubija mines and the tense Mostar are in the British sector.

The most discreet area of US involvement is a new clandestine mission run by the CIA in Bosnia to monitor the activities of opponents of the Dayton deal.

President Bill Clinton is unlikely to face much criticism from the Republican Congress: last month the US Senate backed the mission on condition that the White House help equip Bosnian government forces.

Mr Perry tried to allay European fears. "I think they understand at this stage we don't want an arms race, and we will work this in the context of an arms control agreement," he said at the weekend.

● The United Nations Security Council created a new force of about 5,000 troops, backed by Nato planes to demilitarise eastern Slavonia, the last Serb held region of Croatia and return it to Zagreb's control.

Thai monk admits killing

Nick Cumming-Bruce in Bangkok and Owen Bowcott

A BUDDHIST monk confessed this week to murdering Johanne Masheder from Wincle, Cheshire. Police found her body hidden in a cave near a temple at one of Thailand's most popular tourist destinations.

The 23-year-old's remains were identified by her father, Stuart, who had flown to Thailand with his wife, Jackie, to search for her.

Ms Masheder had been missing since failing to catch a flight back to Britain on December 21 at the end of a four-month journey around the world.

She is the third Briton to have been found murdered abroad already this year — heightening concerns about the safety of backpacker tourism. In Thailand itself, the killing has focused attention on the less-than-saintly behaviour of some Buddhist monks.

Thai police on Sunday charged Yodchat Suapoo, aged 21, with Ms Masheder's murder after he had admitted raping and robbing her.

A local police officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Apichit Thianpermpool, said Suapoo was an amphetamine addict who used the stolen money to buy drugs, and had previously spent two years in jail for rape. He had joined the monastery eight months earlier, after his release.

A newly-qualified solicitor, Ms Masheder had been on the final stage of a backpacking holiday, and was due to take up her first job with a London law firm early this year.

The dangers of travelling in parts of Asia were highlighted last week when a man from Oxfordshire was found dead in Bangalore, southern India.

However, according to Foreign Office figures, the most dangerous destinations for British tourists over the past five years have been the US, South Africa and Spain.

India tries to end infanticide

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi

INDIA has banned the misuse of ultrasound, amniocentesis and other tests used to determine the sex of a foetus, in an attempt to limit deliberate abortions of girls.

The law, which took effect this month, carries a heavy fine and a three-year jail term for parents and doctors involved in the abortion of a healthy foetus. It follows last year's ban on clinics that specialise in determining the sex of foetuses, and restricts the use of such tests to detecting genetic diseases.

Women's activists argue that laws are not enough to save baby girls in a society where female children are viewed primarily as a financial burden. A social transformation is required.

In many Indian communities, custom demands that each stage in a girl's life must be marked by a series of costly rituals. Increasing commercialism has magnified the cost of weddings especially. Although dowries are illegal, grooms' families are said to be ever more greedy. At the same time, people want fewer children and are unwilling to have large families just to satisfy the desire for a son.

Social activists and midwives say abortion of girl foetuses is the modern, middle-class variant of an ancient practice of female infanticide.

In the northern states of Haryana and Punjab, where fertile lands guarantee a standard of living well above the national average, the last decade has seen a boom in ultrasound clinics. In these areas, there are already only 85 girls for 100 boys.

Across India, there is little reliable data on how many babies are sacrificed to the cult of the boy child. But between 1981 and 1991, the number of females per 1,000 males declined from 934 to 929. In developed countries there are 1,060 females for every 1,000 males.

Both loved and loathed, Papandreou finally goes

Helena Smith in Athens

ANDREAS PAPANDREOU resigned as Greece's prime minister this week, having dominated Greek politics for the past 30 years and carved out a new role for the country in Europe.

He introduced popular socialism to Greece, turning his Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) into the country's main political force. He founded the party on the ruins of the Colonels' regime, which collapsed in 1974, and came to power in seven years as Greece's first Socialist leader.

His first Pasok government was widely hailed as healer of the country's bitter divide in the aftermath of its brutal 1946-49 civil war.

Mr Papandreou had a difficult relationship with Nato but held back from taking Greece out of the alliance. He irritated the United States by forging close links with Middle East radicals, including the Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gadafy.

His resignation marks the end of a political era. Few leaders have ever been as loved or loathed as Mr Papandreou, who could captivate Greeks as much with his brilliant oratory as his highly public extra-marital affairs.

Mr Papandreou made a spectacular comeback in 1993 when he was returned to office for a third term. His re-election, following a humiliating defeat in 1989 amid scandals that left him tarnished as the only civilian leader to be accused of wrongdoing, cast him as Greece's eternal comeback man.

But the dramatic decline in his health since the Socialists returned to power and his steadfast refusal to delegate powers — until his decision to resign on Monday — meant that vital government decisions were put on hold.

During his months in hospital, Mr Papandreou, aged 76, came under fire within Pasok for his failure to appoint a successor and over the role of his controversial third wife, Dimitra Liana, whom he made his chief of staff.

A former stewardess 36 years his junior, she was heavily accused of meddling in government affairs.

A master tactician, Mr Papandreou was one of Greece's most maverick politicians and probably the last of Europe's post-war charismatic leaders. Even his battle to hang on to life has become a thriller with the veteran politician miraculously cheating death several times.

None of the heirs now jockeying for his job can boast his extraordinary colour or flair. Pasok was a one-man movement built around its leader.

While sweeping to power on a platform of change, he soon abandoned his anti-European and anti-American rhetoric to become a staunch defender of his allies and fiscally conservative in the late 1980s.

With infighting now a party hallmark, few believe that Pasok will be able to survive as an entity.

Costas Simitis, aged 58, a university academic and former industry minister, and Gerasimos Arsenis, the defence minister, have already emerged as the front-runners in the race to replace Mr Papandreou.

Thuggery taints Palestine election

Shyam Bhatia in Salfit, West Bank

IN THE remote West Bank town of Salfit, parliamentary candidate Khamis al Hammad was addressing a rally when five armed men interrupted his speech. After identifying themselves as members of the Palestine secret police, they arrested Hammad's campaign manager and hustled him off the podium into a waiting car. No one dared to interfere.

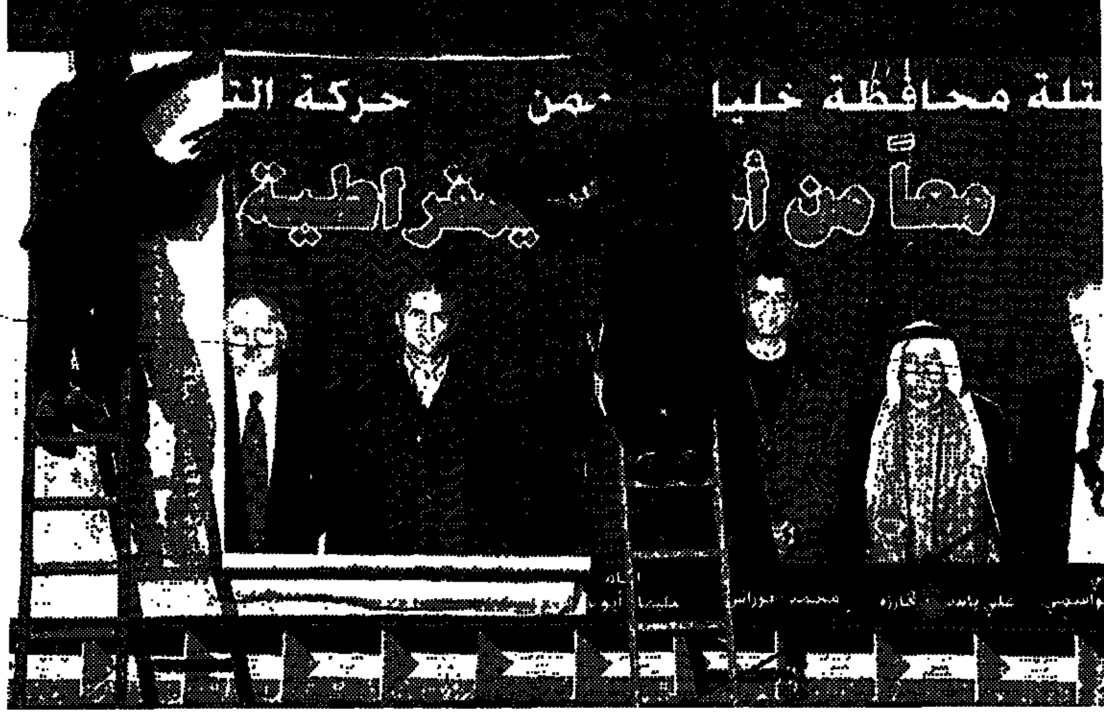
The raid came as no surprise to the voters of Salfit. For weeks, many of their favourite candidates have complained of threats and harassment from supporters of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat. Unlike some larger West Bank towns, Salfit has only one seat in the 88-member legislative council to be elected on Saturday.

"Arafat wants his man to win this seat," charges Hammad. "They are using all kinds of methods to ensure that only their candidate will win the majority of the votes."

His campaign manager, Thamin Badah, was taken by police to Jericho last week from where he has, to all intents and purposes, disappeared. At first Palestine police denied the arrest had anything to do with the election, saying Badah "knew of a plan to assassinate a leading Palestinian official". After protests from international observers monitoring the election, the police claimed Badah was arrested for "incitement".

Badah is a member of the Palestinian People's Party, formerly the Communist Party. His home town of Salfit, known as the Little Kremlin, has always been a stronghold of Palestinian communists.

In such a constituency Arafat's hand-picked Fatah nominee, Ahmed Deek, has little hope of winning. But Arafat believes he cannot afford to lose. That is why his supporters are patrolling the streets of Salfit at night to tear down the election posters of rivals. Hammad believes he is the latest victim in this campaign of intimidation, but he still hopes "the will of the people will prevail".



Faces that fit . . . an election poster for Arafat's party goes up in Hebron

The problem is that the people's aspirations and Arafat's own desires do not necessarily overlap. This weekend's elections are for both a legislative council and the presidency. Arafat and his supporters will win with an overwhelming majority, not least because all the main opposition parties are boycotting the election. The 73-year-old leader of the Palestinian Women's Movement, Samiha Khalil, is the only Palestinian who "dares" to run against "President" Arafat.

But even the knowledge that his party is bound to win has not stopped Arafat from tampering. Many Fatah activists successful in election primaries discovered that he had personally intervened to exclude them from the party list. New lists were drawn up and priority given to Fatah veterans who accompanied the PLO leader back from exile in Tunis.

In Jerusalem, the party list is headed by Ahmed Qreia, one of the architects of the Oslo Accord with Israel who, until recently, served as the minister of economic affairs in Arafat's cabinet. In the West Bank cities of Hebron and Tulkarm, two Arafat lieutenants, Abbas Zaki and Hakkam Balawi, have displaced Fatah young bloods.

In another move that has enraged young Palestinians, the PLO leader has included in his party lists those elderly heads of clans deemed to be capable of building up vote banks based on clan affiliations. When disappointed Fatah operatives retaliated by announcing that they would run as independents, Arafat warned he would kick the rebels out of his party.

"I think the Fatah lists will lose a lot of their power," says Salwa Hudayb, of the Palestinian Women's Movement, who had hoped to run on Fatah's Jerusalem list. "The new faces are in no sense representative. They were chosen and not elected." Her bitter reaction highlights tensions between what the Palestinians describe as the "outside versus the inside".

The outside includes those Palestinian leaders who have spent the past four decades in the diaspora wandering in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and, finally, Tunisia. Insiders are Palestinian activists from Gaza and the West Bank who were brought up under Israeli occupation and take credit for the intifada. They paid dearly to end the Israeli occupation and paved the way for the return of the outsiders.

For most young and enthusiastic insiders, men like Qreia are political parasites who have cashed in on the suffering of their own people. One of the most cited cases centres on the gimmick staged by Qreia after Israel withdrew its soldiers from Bethlehem.

Palestinian families in a nearby refugee camp spent a night demolishing the barbed wire fence Israel erected around them. Next morning Qreia arrived, accompanied by television crews. Refugee families thought he was visiting them as a show of solidarity, but bodyguards refused to let them shake his hand. The cameras filmed him as he made a show of pulling down a few strands of barbed wire; once the filming ended, he left. Now Palestinians understand the visit was only a photo-opportunity in his personal election campaign.

Perhaps the biggest shock stems from the choice of planning minister, Nabil Shaath, to represent the militant town of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. Unlike the poverty-stricken residents, who are renowned for their defiance of the Israeli army, Shaath is a millionaire.

"What is this man's revolutionary background?" asks Ziad Saleh, an unemployed engineer. "When our children were in the streets throwing stones, his children were shopping in London and Paris."

In a free and fair election, Khan Yunis families say unpopular candidates like Shaath would never be elected. But they have no illusions that Arafat will do his best to guarantee a favourable outcome.

Under such circumstances, international observers recruited by the European Union and others will have their work cut out. The Swedish head of the European observers' team, Carl Lidbom, was the author of a strongly worded protest last month that drew attention to the political manipulation of the electoral process to suit Arafat's supporters.

"These elections are important because they will determine whether the future Palestinian regime is a dictatorship or a democracy," says a Jerusalem-based Palestinian academic. "What we have seen so far suggests the future is tilting towards a dictatorship.

"For years, we have dreamed of a British-style parliament where government and opposition shout at each other without fear of being arrested. I suspect we will end up with a subdued, rubber-stamp parliament typical of the Arab world."

Human rights advocates say the Arafat regime has already shown signs of dictatorship by cracking down on journalists and human rights activists. Last month Arafat ordered the arrest of newspaper editor Maher Alami for refusing to run a front-page story about the PLO chairman. Alami spent six days under interrogation in Jericho.

A week later, Arafat ordered the arrest of prominent human rights activist Bassem Eid, who led the campaign for the editor's release. — *The Observer*

Washington Post, page 15

Mexican drug lord captured

Anita Snow in Mexico City

ONE of Mexico's most notorious drug lords, a fugitive on the FBI's 10 most-wanted list, was behind bars in the United States on Monday after eluding authorities on both sides of the border for years.

The arrest of Juan Garcia Abrego in northern Mexico and his deportation to Houston was an enormous victory for Mexico, coming after criticism that widespread corruption has prevented the government from halting the flow of narcotics into the US.

His deportation to face charges in the US "is important as a signal that international cooperation can break the formerly impenetrable shield held by the narco-traffickers," said Bob Weiner, spokesman for the White House office of National Drug Control Policy.

Garcia Abrego, aged 51, the reputed head of the Gulf cartel, Mexico's second most powerful drug organisation after the Juarez cartel, has been linked to top Mexican officials accused of corruption, including Raul Salinas, the elder brother of the former Mexican president.

Last March, US Attorney General Janet Reno put him on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list. The Mexican government had offered a $1 million reward for his arrest and the US government had offered $300,000.

Garcia Abrego was arrested on Sunday in Villa de Juarez, a small town about 35 miles northeast of the industrialised city of Monterrey.

He faces a 26-count indictment on charges including drug trafficking, money laundering and murder.

President Ernesto Zedillo moved to extradite the drug lord to the US because "his remaining in the country would be inconvenient," said a government statement. The FBI says Garcia Abrego was born in the border town of La Paloma, Texas, and is an American citizen.

The Gulf cartel, headquartered in the border city of Matamoros on the Gulf of Mexico, was created in 1984. It is believed to smuggle hundreds of tons of Colombian cocaine into the US each year by bribing Mexican officials. — *AP*

Italy presides over EU without a leader

John Hooper in Rome

IT NOW seems certain that Italy will be unable to provide the European Union with more than token leadership for much of its six-month presidency.

The head of state, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, began talks this week aimed at resolving his country's latest political crisis. But even on the most optimistic projections Italy will not have a new government before early March — and the gap could stretch to May.

The prime minister, Lamberto Dini, who had tendered his resignation at the end of last year, confirmed his decision on Thursday last week — only 12 days after Italy took over the leadership of the EU. He said he could no longer count on the fragile parliamentary majority which had kept his non-party government of technocrats in power — against the odds — for almost a year. Mr Dini will head a caretaker administration while Italy's future is decided.

Since parliament is so divided, the only choice appears to be between a return to the polls and an idea first put forward by the former prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. This envisages the formation of an all-embracing government of national unity, carrying out institutional reforms.

President Scalfaro is loath to call an election while fundamental issues such as Mr Berlusconi's control of the media remain unresolved. A former Christian Democrat, the head of state has been accused of trying to leave time for the re-emergence of a broad-based party, like the old Christian Democrats.

Mr Berlusconi's idea has won a cautious welcome from Massimo D'Alema, the leader of Italy's main leftwing party, the ex-communist PDS. He told party members they must be open to a "democratic compromise" with Mr Berlusconi and the centre-right.

After a first round of consultations with party leaders and others, President Scalfaro is expected to appoint a mediator to see whether a cross-party accord is feasible.

EU officials played down the risk of paralysis in Brussels, saying this would not be the first time a country had held elections during its term of office. But Italy, with its leisurely procedures, is exceptional.

The soundings by the president and his representative are likely to take weeks. Even if they succeed, it will require several more weeks for the new prime minister to choose a cabinet, draft a programme and get it endorsed by both houses of parliament.

If the efforts to build a cross-party administration fail, President Scalfaro will have to call an election. In that event, it could well be late April or early May before the EU has effective leadership.

German woes, page 14

Rifkind survives Beijing's obstacle course

Andrew Higgins in Beijing

SO DIZZY and disorientating are the changes in Beijing that even the street-wise chauffeurs of China's foreign affairs ministry lose their way. A three-day visit to China last week by the UK Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, ended with a cavalcade of limousines retreating — gears grinding and in reverse — through the back streets of the Chinese capital.

The motorcade had gone to the wrong address. Instead of taking Mr Rifkind, the British ambassador and assorted Foreign Office mandarins to the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office to discuss the final 18 months of British colonial rule, the cars pulled up outside a bureau responsible for Taiwan.

It is not just China's drivers who are confused. Everywhere in Beijing, evidence abounds of an extraordinary metamorphosis: glass and marble plazas sprouting along the Avenue of Eternal Peace; the world's biggest McDonald's just down from Tiananmen Square; a floodlit golf driving range in what used to be a cabbage patch; and a new six-lane airport highway replacing a narrow strip of tarmac clogged with donkey carts.

Also brand new are the premises of the supreme court. And it was here, entirely untouched by any wind of change, that judges last month took 10 minutes to reject the appeal of an unemployed electrician called Wei Jingsheng against a 14-year sentence for subversion.

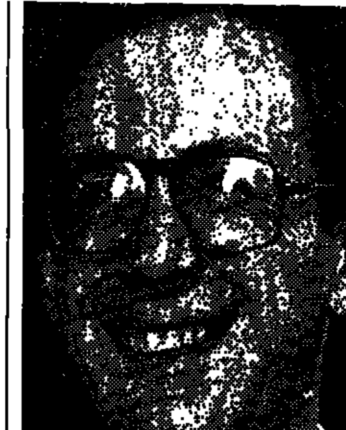
Mr Rifkind, making his first trip to China, struggled to keep his bearings. On the way from the airport, a modest Mercedes provided by Chinese authorities blew a tyre, a mishap that got the Foreign Secretary upgraded to a stretched Cadillac limo with mini-bar and TV.

At a candle-lit banquet hosted by the British Chamber of Commerce, Mr Rifkind gushed about the marketing opportunities offered by China's double-digit growth: "When you are dealing with a country of 1.2 billion you don't need me to tell you the potential purchasing power of this nation." Britain has invested more than £4 billion in China — far more than any other European country.

But he also promised to exert "clear, courteous and firm pressure" on human rights issues. In meetings with the prime minister, Li Peng, and President Jiang Zemin he asked after Mr Wei, the jailed champion of political reform as China's essential "fifth modernisation". He also voiced concern about conditions in China's orphanages, where thousands of children have died — according to Human Rights Watch — from neglect and abuse.

It is this coexistence of rapid reform and harsh reaction that makes the future of Hong Kong — the heart of Sino-British relations — so uncertain.

While assuring Mr Rifkind that it would grant Hong Kong a "high degree of autonomy" after 1997, China also stressed its determination to disband the territory's elected Legislative Council. "This case is closed," said the foreign ministry spokesman, Chen Jian. "The Chinese position will not change."



Rifkind: 'very positive' visit

Nor did Beijing show any inclination to change its view of Chris Patten, governor of Hong Kong, whom it has treated as an outcast since he set about reforming the colony's political system three years ago.

Just before his meeting with President Jiang, Mr Rifkind made a stop in Tiananmen Square, scene of the 1989 student movement and now home to a giant digital clock counting down the seconds before China takes back Hong Kong.

If China has any ideology these days it is this: nationalism and order. As a reminder of what disorder can mean, state-run television has featured daily reports on the hostage seizure in southern Russia by Chechen rebels.

Mr Rifkind made scant effort to disguise Britain's waning influence. Unlike previous ministers visiting Hong Kong and China, he made clear that the only real guarantee for the colony's future is China's self-interest. "We cannot impose solutions upon them. I cannot suggest to you, nor would I wish to, that we have a physical power which is not available to us," he told Hong Kong legislators before travelling to Beijing. This, he said, was the "simple, unvarnished truth".

Despite China's refusal to budge on the Legislative Council or Mr Patten, the visit was, Mr Rifkind insisted, "very positive". It clarified the right of foreigners to stay in Hong Kong after 1997, produced agreement on air services and opened the way for the colony to build a massive container terminal half the size of Rotterdam.

Britain and China also signed an agreement stipulating that only the Hong Kong government will be allowed to issue passports after the colony returns to Chinese control.

But detailed discussion is still needed on some of these issues. Speaking of foreign residents' future rights, Mr Chen said: "This was an exchange of views between the two foreign ministers, not a concrete negotiation."

Unburdened by diplomatic protocol, Mr Patten put things more bluntly in Hong Kong: "The question is this. Is China committed to real democratisation or is it committed to a sort of cardboard cut-out version? Is it committed to a counterfeit version?" China itself may not yet know.

Martin Woollacott, page 12
Le Monde, page 20

The Week

SOCIALIST Jorge Sampaio emphatically won Portugal's presidential election, beating his conservative rival, former premier Anibal Cavaco Silva.

COLOMBIAN guerrillas dynamited the country's main oil pipeline near Palitas, 500km north of the capital Bogotá, and shut down pumping.

BRITAIN has sent its high commissioner, Thorold Masefield, back to Nigeria, two months after he was withdrawn in protest at the execution of the minority rights campaigner Ken Saro-Wiwa.

THE international race to buy up TV rights to prestige sports events intensified when Rupert Murdoch's empire submitted a joint bid worth more than $1.8 billion to broadcast the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

LECH WALESA, the former Polish president, said he intends to go back to work as an electrician in the Gdansk shipyards where he first came to notice as a Solidarity organiser.

EXPERTS warned that Australians could face more shark attacks after a 5m mako rammed and sank a fishing boat. It circled the survivors for nine hours while the three men and a woman clung to a tiny life raft.

KING Moshoeshoe II of Lesotho was killed in a car accident, a year after he was restored to the throne of his mountain kingdom for a second time.

A DEPUTY from the Freedom Party of the rightwing Austrian populist Jörg Haider was voted into a leading parliamentary position despite controversy about Mr Haider's recent praise of Hitler's Waffen-SS.

CHINESE archaeologists claim to have unearthed one of the world's most magnificent antiquities, a shroud made from thousands of pieces of jade in which a king was buried more than 2,000 years ago.

PRO-INDEPENDENCE rebels seeking international publicity kidnapped seven western wildlife researchers, including four Britons and a pregnant German woman, and several Indonesian scientists, in a remote valley in Irian Jaya, the Indonesian half of the island of New Guinea. All the hostages are said to be in good health.

ABOUT 600 masked and heavily armed members of the "historic wing" of the Front for the National Liberation of Corsica mounted a show of force for the media to announce a three-month suspension of their bombing campaign, shortly before a visit by the French interior minister, Jean-Louis Debré.

Gold becomes a status symbol in nervous China

Alarmed by rapid changes in society, people are clinging to an old standard, writes **John Gittings**

CHINA has invited foreign investors to join the gold rush sweeping the country — the precious metal has become the status symbol in Deng Xiaoping's acquisitive society.

The country produced 105 tons of gold last year, the world's sixth largest output. Gold bureau officials are offering profit returns of up to 30 per cent annually.

Gold mining is not without its own controversies. Prison labour is often used in the state sector, particularly in remote provinces such as Tibet. No one knows how much is produced in illegal private mines, where prospectors wage gun battles over claims. Many peasants seeking their fortune have died in unsafe shafts burrowed into the mountains.

Throughout Asia the affluent lifestyle of the emerging economic tigers has boosted demand for gold, but China is now the world's biggest market. Estimates of gold consumption are as high as 250 tons yearly.

A popular restaurant in Guangzhou offers "golden banquets". Guests may select abalone, sharks fin or crocodile, topped with 24-carat gold leaf.

The gold industry has become a paradigm of the new China, where oases of prosperity are expanding even in poorer provinces, but income gaps have widened and life is a desperate struggle for millions.

Mining accidents are regularly reported in the official press as a warning to illegal miners. When a mound of rocks swept down a mountainside burying more than 50 miners and their families alive, the official China Gold said this should be "a lesson to those who covet gold more than life".

Shanty towns run by gold barons, with drugs and prostitution rife, have sprung up near the illegal mines.

People in Chumarleb, a remote county in the north-west province of Qinghai, report the arrival of thousands of goldminers. Hundreds prospect at a time for gold, carrying machetes or machine-guns, and the local police force of 40 officers is powerless.

One enterprising group of gold smugglers from a state-owned mine evaded the attention of security guards by concealing the gold in a coffin, which was accompanied by mourners and a funeral band. Once safely outside, the procession stopped and the "corpse" scrambled out with some difficulty, his pockets weighed down with gold.

But some of the grimmest tales come from state mines on the Tibetan plateau, where political prisoners are used as cheap labour. Refugees have told of being forced to work in primitive conditions to extract gold and other rare metals, such as uranium, lithium and caesium.



Going for gold . . . Peasants flock to remote Chumarleb, where the police are powerless to stop illegal mining PHOTO: BRADLEY ROWE

"There was no knocking off till the quota was fulfilled," said one refugee interviewed by the London-based Tibet Information Network, "which meant that those who could not work quickly had to go on digging until 11 o'clock or even midnight. . . Everyone had sores on their back from carrying, and on their hands."

Some prisoners, Chinese as well as Tibetan, were said to have become so desperate that they "deliberately broke their own legs or even smashed their own heads open with their picks or shovels".

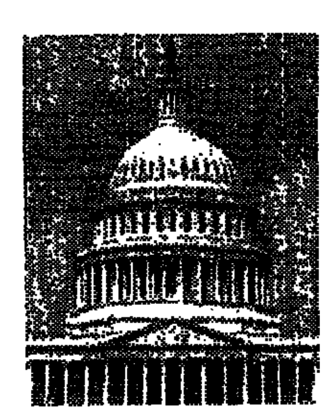
Illegal mining appears to be encouraged in Tibet as well. Tibetans living where gold can be panned or dug for are forced to pay a "gold tax". This unusual levy requires them either to prospect for gold themselves — and then hand part of it over — or pay an impossibly large sum in lieu.

High gold consumption reflects the traditional faith in gold as a hedge against inflation. Nearly 40 per cent of Chinese city-dwellers, according to official statistics, own one or more gold ornaments.

Older residents in Shanghai recall the desperate last years of the Nationalist regime before the Communist victory in 1949. The situation now is very different, though inflation at 20 per cent or more annually does worry people. But today's gold craze also reflects a sense of social instability and doubt about the future.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 21 1996

Fortune favours Clinton campaign



The US this week

Martin Walker

AN EXTRAORDINARY hare was started last week by Money Magazine, which added up the ever-mounting legal fees of the Clintons and assessed their known wealth and salary, and concluded that they are about to become the first bankrupts to inhabit the White House. The president's press secretary, Mike McCurry, backed up the yarn, confirming that the president and first lady were indeed in financial hot water.

Then in his first formal press conference in five months Clinton himself joined in. Asked if bankruptcy indeed loomed, he replied, "I have never added it all up, but that's probably right". He went on to say it was far worse for those of his staff who had no special legal defence funds to help them pay for their own lawyers. Indeed, Hillary Clinton's chief of staff, Margaret Williams, who has been repeatedly grilled by the Senate committee investigating Whitewater, is in dire financial straits.

"Our problem is that we are considered agents of an elected official and so cannot solicit money," says Michael Cardozo, who runs the Clintons' legal defence trust fund, to which donations are limited to a maximum $1,000. "No direct mail. No fund raisers. No Barbra Streisand concerts. We cannot even advertise our address or phone number. All the money has to come in over the transom."

However much public sympathy they may wring from all this, Bill and Hillary Clinton are not officially bankrupt. Nor are they ever likely to be, whatever the scale of the legal bills they now face as they battle the tide of Whitewater scandal. Although the president's legal expense trust has raised only $865,000 so far, against legal fees estimated to be rising by more than $1 million a year, the Clintons' personal lawyer, David Kendall, has said that the full bill will not be presented until the case is over.

Although his usual billing rate is $400 per hour (more than three times the $120 per hour Mrs Clinton used to charge at the Rose law firm), few of his colleagues at the Washington bar expect Kendall to be too precise about his fees. To have been the president's personal counsel is a distinct and bankable accolade in the profession. In the past, all private presidential legal bills have been negotiated down to whatever figure has been raised by the legal defence fund. And, of course, if no indictments are ever handed down, most of the Clintons' legal fees will probably qualify for reimbursement under the Independent Counsel Act.

Moreover, the Clintons' own private nest egg has been growing apace thanks to economic growth and the Wall Street booms of the past three years. Their savings, reported in 1992, totalled $862,000 in a conventional mixture of mutual funds, stocks and shares, retirement accounts, and federal and state government savings bonds.

When they entered the White House, those savings were put into a blind trust (which means they have no idea how the money is being invested) run by Essex Investment Management of Boston. Between June 1993 and September last year, the published returns of the Essex group show that it scored a 50 per cent growth in its stock holdings. As the most prestigious, if not the richest of private clients, the Clinton portfolio may have done even better. And the stock market rise since then suggests that the Clinton family savings are now close to $1.5 million.

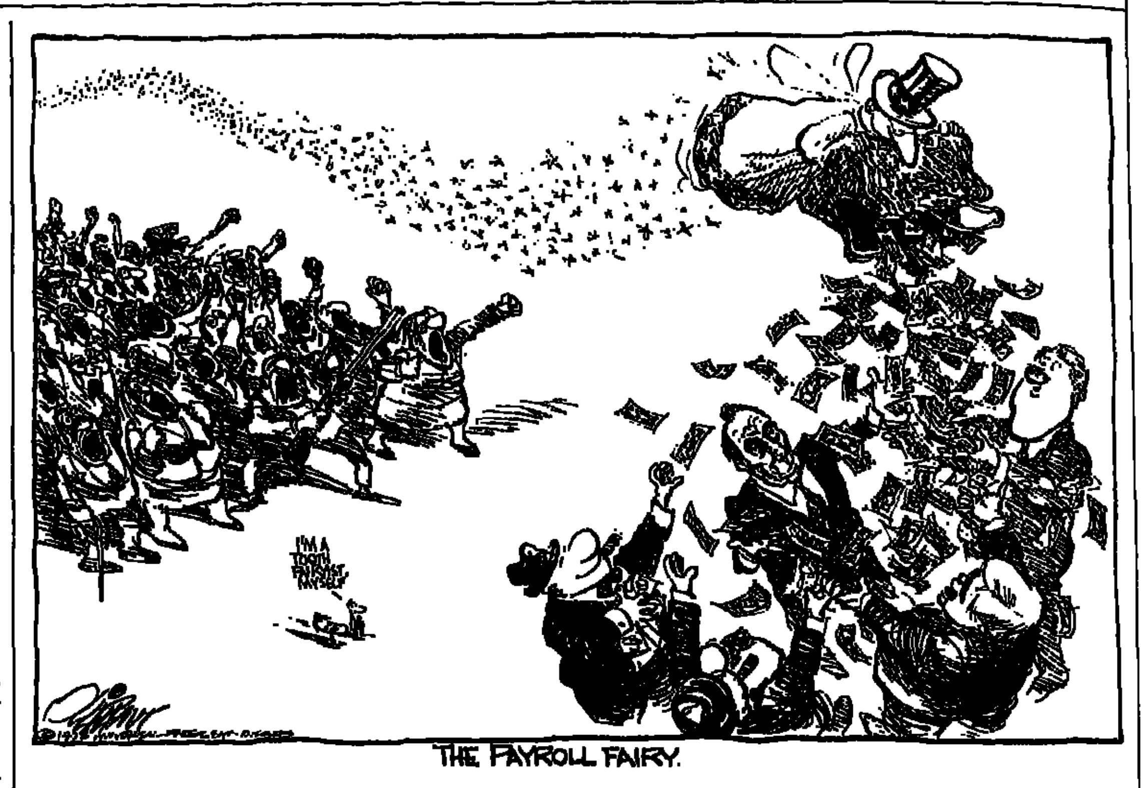
Against this, they owed $64,800 on the mortgage on the apartment left to them when Hillary's father died. Just before that bequest, a local Arkansas resident named Jack Schuster came generously to the Clintons' rescue when it was noted that they owned no home at all. He handed them the deeds to a run-down, two-bedroom house just opposite Clinton's boyhood home in Little Rock. Legally valued at just $12,242, the house has a leaky roof, and local estate agents tactfully call it "a handyman's special". But at least there is a home for them to go to.

Until he began to receive the presidential salary of $200,000 a year (plus $50,000 for expenses and $100,000 for travel expenses), Bill Clinton had never earned more than the $35,000 a year paid to him as governor of Arkansas. But the expenses were good. In fiscal year 1988, the taxpayers of Arkansas paid $783,116.33 to uphold the governor's life style, maintain his mansion and grounds, and provide a 12-man security staff.

Still, the pay check was indubitably small. Mrs Clinton made up for that, earning more than $200,000 in her final year as a partner at the Rose law firm. Even so, a total worth of $1.5 million for two Yale law graduates as they approach 50 is modest. Some of their Yale classmates now make more than that each year.

The Clintons have never been in politics for the money. But they will do well enough from the life none the less. On his retirement, whether after this year's election or after the election of 2000, Bill Clinton will be entitled to a presidential pension equivalent to his salary. He will also qualify for a full Arkansas state pension, because each of the 12 years he served as governor qualifies for three years of pension rights, and the two years as attorney-general counts for double pension rights.

All of this is picayune by comparison with the cost and scale of the business of politics. A new survey of the main campaign donors by the Centre for Public Integrity, published in book form last week as The Buying Of The President, is filled with intriguing information about the symbiotic relationship



THE PAYROLL FAIRY.

between votes and money. "It's a package deal between politicians and their backers. You are getting their patrons when you elect them," said Charles Lewis, director of the Centre and author of the new book. "To be perfectly blunt, it gives the impression that legislation is being bought and sold. The presidential campaign is not so much a beauty contest or a horse race, but instead a giant auction, in which multi-million dollar interests compete to influence and gain access to the president."

Lewis suggests that the real political battle of the 1996 presidential campaign will be between Wall Street, the gun lobby and the California wine industry. These are, he claims, the three biggest financial backers of Clinton, and the Republican candidates, Senators Phil Gramm and Bob Dole, respectively.

Clinton has received more than $107,000 from the Goldman Sachs finance house alone, as we might expect from the investment firm which provided the president with his treasury secretary. But Clinton has also been close to the money. Back in 1984, one of his main donors in Arkansas was John Gutfreund of Solomon Brothers.

CLINTON, and the Democratic party, have done rather well from NationsBank, which in October 1994 lent the straitened Democrats $3.5 million at a favourable rate of interest when the party was straining every nerve to cling on to its congressional majority against the Republican surge. The loan was issued two weeks after Clinton signed into law a bill which NationsBank badly wanted, allowing it and other large banks to duck the expense of opening a formal branch in every state where they do business.

Dole has received $381,000 from the Gallo wine-making family of California, which paid another $790,000 to his private charity, the Dole Foundation. The relationship between Dole and the Gallo family began when he lobbied the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to let them change the wording of the labels on their cheaper bottles from "bulk process" to "secondary fermentation before bottling".

The Gallo family's gratitude to Dole was reinforced in 1986, when he steered an amendment through a tax reform bill which saved the family an estimated $100 million in inheritance taxes. By way of political insurance, the Gallo family has also given $50,000 to the Clinton re-election campaign.

Gramm has received $440,000 from the National Rifle Association, the main arm of the gun lobby, and another $140,000 from the American Medical Association, in gratitude for his role in defeating the Clinton health reform plan. Apart from replacing Clinton in the White House, Gramm's great political mission of the moment is to overturn the ban on assault weapons which Clinton signed into law two years ago.

The gap between these Big Three — Clinton, Dole and Gramm — and the Republican also-rans is remarkably wide. The highest donation to the former Tennessee governor, Lamar Alexander, was $83,000 from a home town property company. The largest single donation of right wing firebrand Pat Buchanan was $10,000 from a Nebraska theme park family, and Senator Richard Lugar's most generous backers were the Eli Lilley pharmaceutical company, based in his home state of Indiana.

More than $100 million has already been raised for this year's presidential race by the various candidates, led by Clinton whose $26 million war chest is the largest amount yet raised by an incumbent president this early in the campaigning season. He may even be on equal footing with the multi-millionaire Steve Forbes, who says he is ready to spend $25 million on his presidential bid.

The presidential race is just the tip of the financial iceberg in the best democracy money can buy. The 1992 election season in House, Senate and presidential races cost more than $1.1 billion, according to figures by the federal election commission.

In this context, it seems appropriate that the Parker Brothers game corporation has just issued a licence for a new Washington version of that grand old classic, Monopoly. Under the Washington rules, players may buy the White House or the Capitol.

Incidentally, don't just blame the politicians. The voters are in on the game too. In Oakland, California, to increase voter turnout in the off-year municipal elections last November, those who turned up at the polls were rewarded by a sheaf of coupons offering discount prices on oil changes and hams, and treatment by a chiropractor. Pulling that voting machine lever can be a great strain.

Liberal proud of his enemies

OBITUARY
Mike Synar

MIKE SYNAR, a liberal Democrat who was elected to Congress eight times by a conservative and largely rural district of Oklahoma, has died of brain cancer aged 45. By far the most liberal of any Democratic Congressman in the South, and one of the most liberal in his party, he sat for the region of Oklahoma around the town of Muskogee, inspiration of the patriotic, anti-hippy and pro-Vietnam war song of the 1960s I'm An Okie From Muskogee.

He first won election to Congress, almost fresh from law school, in 1978, and held the seat until 1994.

"If you can judge a man by the enemies he makes, I'm pretty proud of mine," Synar used to say, ticking off on his fingers the list of his sworn foes. "If you don't like fighting fires, don't be a fireman. And if you don't like casting tough votes, don't be a congressman."

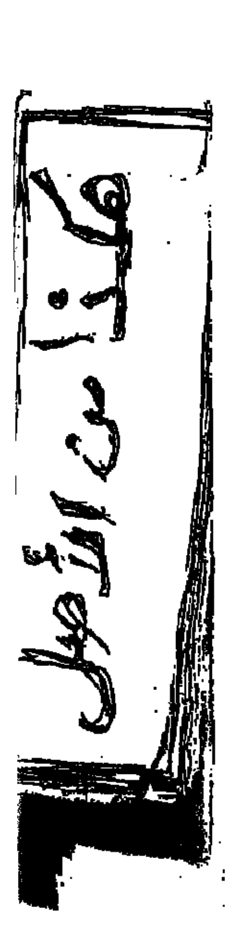
He was for gun control, and the National Rifle Association swore revenge. He was an early campaigner against cigarette advertising and sales to teenagers, and the tobacco lobby hated him. He was also a passionate environmentalist in an oil-producing state, a powerful advocate for campaign finance reform, and rude about the Christian Coalition.

After losing the Democratic primary in 1994, he did not give up political life. President Clinton appointed him to the Bankruptcy Review Commission, and he was about to take up a new job as a kind of global ambassador for the international telecommunications union when the brain cancer was diagnosed last July.

A popular man, with a taste for garish ties, he had a rich sense of humour. When asked by Bill Clinton during the 1992 campaign to play the part of Ross Perot in the practice presidential debates, he came in wearing gigantic false ears and speaking in falsetto.

Martin Walker

Michael Lynn Synar, politician, born October 17, 1950; died January 9, 1996



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 21 1996

Spy scandal fuels calls for purge

South Africa is to reopen old wounds through its Truth Commission, writes **David Beresford** in Johannesburg

WHEN photographs in the South African press last month showed the police chief leering at the camera from what appeared to be an electric chair, it was an occasion to recall the lesson from John 8:32: "The truth shall make you free." It was not San Quentin's "Old Sparky" that had Commissioner George Fivaz in its coils, but a lie-detector.

The scene was staged by Mr Fivaz, not to clear himself of any allegation of wrong-doing, but to smooth the way for other force commanders of more dubious reputation to be subjected to trial by electronic ordeal.

But nothing more has been heard or seen of the great purge by polygraph. The police public relations department say force commanders are re-assessing the financial costs.

Yet it might be said that strapping security chiefs to electrodes is not only expensive, but redundant, since the day of the great lie-detector test is at hand. The long-awaited Truth Commission inquiring into atrocities and conspiracies of the apartheid era is to start its investigations at the end of this month.

The advent of the truth-telling exercise is drawing mixed feelings. It will not, as the genocide trials in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia are intended to do, satisfy the thirst for retribution among victims. Evidence to the commission (to the degree it is heard in public, which is discretionary) will not be incriminatory, even in cases where confessed crimes are judged too dastardly to merit amnesty.

This has led to passionate denunciations of the exercise by Ntsiki Biko, the widow of Steve Biko, the murdered Black Consciousness leader, and Churchill Mxenge, the brother of Griffiths Mxenge, a solicitor also murdered by the security forces. They have formed a lobby group, the Association of Victims of Unsolved Apartheid Atrocities, threatening constitutional litigation to stop it.



Before the massacre . . . Nine Inkatha members were killed during a protest outside ANC headquarters in 1994. Those responsible are not up for amnesty
PHOTOGRAPH: PETER DEJONG

Even civil rights lawyers who have devoted their careers to fighting the crimes of apartheid question what can be gained by re-opening the wounds of the apartheid era. But a new spy scandal offers fresh ammunition to those who believe the Truth Commission has a critical role to play in liberating the country from its past.

The scandal developed earlier this month when the country's largest newspaper group, Independent Newspapers — owned by the Irish tycoon Tony O'Reilly — claimed to have uncovered evidence that the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) was spying on police commanders.

The reports quoted Mr Fivaz as confirming that several of his senior commanders had complained they were under surveillance by mysterious agents. He also "confirmed" that a member of the NIA, Dirk Coetzee, had confessed to one of his officers that he had been given instructions to place the police commanders under surveillance.

The allegations resulted in a predictable storm. The head of the NIA issued furious denials and the deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, announced a presidential commission to investigate the claims.

Superficially, the scandal seemed a case of an intelligence agency exceeding its mandate. But there are grounds for suspecting a more complex story lies behind it.

The former captain Coetzee is famous as the man who blew the "hit squad scandal" in the 1980s, disclosing the existence of government-sanctioned assassination units among the police.

Capt Coetzee, who joined the African National Congress after his confessions and was recruited to the NIA, has been the target of efforts by his former police colleagues to exact retribution. He has survived at least two assassination attempts and smear tactics.

Is the latest spy scandal another such attempt to smear Capt Coetzee? He is alleged to have made the admission of spying on the police (which he denies) while being questioned about his responsibility for the Mxenge murder. The investigating officer who questioned him is a former security policeman acting on the orders of Major General Karel "Suiker" Britz.

The general, who now heads the National Priority Crimes unit, is former commander of the notorious murder squads — units with tangential involvement in hit squad activities. Gen Britz has a spectacularly poor record in solving political crimes. One such crime he investigated and failed to solve was an attempt to assassinate Capt Coetzee.

Or is the NIA spying on the police? Certainly, the force has become so corrupt through the apartheid years that the NIA would be justified in treating it as a potential threat to national security.

Whatever the truth, the continued presence of the "Old Guard" in the security forces is an albatross around the neck of South Africa's brave new society. The need for liberation from it is widely recognised — hence the project of polygraph-testing police commanders.

Tutu, seeker after truth

ONE problem facing the South African government in setting up the Truth Commission was that those best qualified by virtue of their commitment to democratic and libertarian principle had been victims of the security forces the commission would investigate, *writes David Beresford.*

The man responsible for setting up the commission, the justice minister, Dullah Omar, was one such target. A gangster was once hired by the apartheid government to replace Mr Omar's heart tablets with poison.

A military assassination tried to scare Archbishop Desmond Tutu off by planting a baboon's foetus at his front door. But he was an inspired, if obvious, choice as "Mr Truth" to chair the commission.

During apartheid, the archbishop was seen by critics — mistakenly — as something of a chaplain-general to the African National Congress. Since majority rule, the Nobel prizewinner has demonstrated his independence, criticising ANC politicians for riding the "gravy train".

A man of indubitable faith, he does not offer unquestioning service to the Almighty. ("It is quite right to ask God, why," he assured survivors of the Christmas floods in KwaZulu-Natal.)

The other 16 commissioners appointed by President Mandela represent, if not the great, then at least a fair sample of the good in civil society. They include psychologists and lawyers with human rights experience.

The commission will oversee three committees: one on "human rights violations", with the task of uncovering "the truth"; a second on amnesty; and a third investigating reparations.

The government is sinking substantial resources into the commission, at a time of extreme financial stringency. It will have a staff of at least 150, and run for two years at an expected cost of £20 million.

Nigerian scam targets thousands

Michael Gillard on an international rip-off that plays on victims' greed

FOR FIVE years now, by letter or fax, thousands of people all over Britain, picked at random from directories and reference books, have received unsolicited offers from Nigeria to be paid millions simply for allowing their bank accounts to be used in a corrupt business deal.

The scale of this global fraud is stunning. In one case, Scotland Yard discovered a London account through which $27 million had flowed in 18 months. Now Yard detectives have broken the biggest case to date with the conviction of five people last month for their roles in robbing 400 victims in 60 countries of more than £15 million.

Among those targeted have been a judge and a former Metropolitan police commissioner. The biggest loser so far, a Lebanese, parted with $7 million. An American handed over $4 million — $2.5 million *after* he was warned it was a fraud. Another victim handed over £20,000 when he was called at 2am and told that the man with the plan was in jail and needed to bribe the guards to escape.

In a public warning last August, the Nigerian authorities described the losers as "both villains and victims". A Yard detective puts it more bluntly: "They are blinded by greed."

The bait is usually a third of the proceeds from ripping off the Nigerian government on a contract deliberately over-invoiced by corrupt civil servants who need an overseas bank account to get the money out of Nigeria. Of course, there is no contract and there are no blocked funds. The only ones being ripped off are the greedy victims, who proceed to part with money for bribes, taxes, fees and "expenses", like expensive suits and watches, to expedite the pay-off. Last month's convictions of former insurance broker Matthew Oke, who pleaded guilty, was the third success in a year by Fraud Squad detectives against those in London who run the frauds for "Mr Bigs" in Lagos.

Operating from Mayfair accommodation addresses, the Oke crew worked for "Chief" Fred Akosa in Lagos. Scotland Yard has issued an international arrest warrant but Akosa is unlikely to be extradited.

Foreign victims, who responded to the letters, were first relieved of $3,000 each as a consultancy fee by Oke, who claimed to be an agent of the Central Bank of Nigeria, which would process a blocked payment of $20-40 million.

Once hooked, the victims were told of an unexpected problem and enticed to London to meet Akosa. The usual story was that tax or a bribe — £250,000 in one case — needed to be paid to ensure the money left Nigeria.

Oke's associates, Victor Boulter and Victor Watson, posed as bank managers, using the identities of real bank officials in London and New York.

Fraud, with drug trafficking, are the growth areas in the struggling economy of West Africa's potentially richest state. The sheer scale of the operations, and the failure of the Nigerian authorities to curb the fraudsters, have led law enforcement agencies to suggest that there is high-level involvement by the military regime.

The Nigerians, mostly related by tribe, operate like terrorist cells. "They all know one another," says the Yard's Nigerian fraud expert, Det Insp David Grinnion. Those arrested can only identify their immediate contact in Lagos, usually a chief.

Sheffield businessman Lawrence Martin has no doubts about official collusion. He was met by an official limousine and whisked into the Ministry of Defence headquarters in Lagos. He paid £54,000 in "commissions" after signing a phoney printing contract with an army colonel. Nigerian police claimed the officials were "actors" who had bribed their way into an empty office.

Martin points out that the British military attaché would find it more difficult than he did to enter the military headquarters. "The government know who it is, they smile on it quite benignly. It's a very good source of foreign exchange," he says. Nigerian officials deny this.

Five years ago, the letters were full of mis-spellings and poor grammar; now they are slick and sophisticated. The writers claim to be senior civil servants, usually in the National Petroleum Corporation. They leave no doubt that their invitation is to participate in transferring stolen money.

Those who go to Lagos to get their money back can risk more than their lost investment. British businessman David Rollings was shot dead in his Lagos hotel room in 1991. The body of an American victim was dumped outside his hotel. UK businessman Patrick Hillman was rescued from kidnappers in 1992.

And now there is a new "sting" — police are investigating several complaints involving supposed trunks full of "black money" in the form of $100 bills discoloured so that they cannot be used. The money is said to be the result of Nigerian government seizures or covert CIA operations.

Victims are shown a block of blackened paper. One note off the top is removed and, after being treated, it is revealed as a genuine $100 bill. The victims then hand over up to $100,000 to buy special chemicals to cleanse the rest of the "$20 million" stash. Naturally, the trunk contains not money but paper. — *The Observer*

Introducing THE STAKEHOLDER SOCIETY

THE WELFARE STATE

The Week in Britain James Lewis

So, what's the big idea?

TORIES jumped and pundits gushed when the Labour leader, Tony Blair, unleashed his latest "big idea". He told a smallish audience of businessmen in Singapore that he wanted Britain to be a "stakeholder economy where everyone has a chance to get on and succeed" and where the irrelevant left-right political battles had become a thing of the past.

Who, everybody pondered, were these stakeholders to be, and what would be their stake? It was a terrible political mistake, said the Prime Minister, John Major, for New Labour could now begin to be seen in its true corporatist colours. Tory ministers claimed to detect a coded message that Labour would restore power to the trade unions and special interest groups. Mr Blair's lieutenants back in London hailed the opening of a great debate about Britain's future — led by Labour.

The idea of stakeholders has been kicked around by economists for decades, not in relation to national economies but to firms, where employees and customers, as well as shareholders, are deemed to have a legitimate interest in how the firm's assets are used. How could this be extended to explain how Labour — if elected — would govern in the interests of all its people?

Mr Blair took a brief stab at explaining it. His stakeholder economy, he said, would mean retraining the long-term unemployed, making the education system less élitist, moving people off welfare into work, helping people to start their own businesses and encouraging companies to treat their employees as "partners, not cogs in a wheel".

Would stakeholding involve the reform of retirement pensions, profit sharing and works councils in industry? A redistribution of income through taxes and benefits? Another raft of burdensome legislation? The questions were legitimately asked, and will need to be answered if the big idea is not to become a soundbite too far.

CONCERN over the use of the drug Ecstasy by young people was heightened by the death of another teenager, 19-year-old Andreas Bouzis, after taking one tablet of the drug at a nightclub in London. Earlier, another 19-year-old, Helen Cousins, slipped into a coma after taking the drug at a club in Peterborough. She narrowly escaped death when a tracheotomy was carried out to help her to breath during two days in intensive care. "Ecstasy is not worth the dance with death," she said.

Evidence worryingly suggests that teenagers are trying illicit drugs earlier in their lives, and that 13-14 is the peak age for experimentation. Of 768 people under the age of 16 who were surveyed in Leicester, 12.5 per cent of 13-year-olds, 15 per cent of 14-year-olds, and 39 per cent of 15-year-olds had used drugs. Ecstasy was the most commonly used, though others had tried crack or cocaine, cannabis, LSD and amphetamines.

THE DRINKS industry promised to tighten its own rules on the sale of so-called "alcopops" — a range of drinks aimed at young people, first introduced last year — in response to anxiety over their high alcohol content. The brands have innocent-sounding names like Cola Lips and Lemonhead, and have sometimes been sold from the same cabinets as non-alcoholic drinks. But most contain alcohol at between 4 and 5 per cent volume — higher than many beers and lagers.

The brewers' self-regulating body has drawn up guidelines — dismissed by campaigners and health workers as inadequate — to ensure that alcopops "do not overtly appeal to children". Brand imagery should not include characters likely to appeal to under-18s, and alcohol content is to be clearly displayed. But Labour is calling for a parliamentary debate, claiming that most manufacturers will not subscribe to the new code.

HELL may not be such a bad place after all, according to a report by the Church of England's doctrine commission, which criticises past teachings for trying to frighten people too much. While insisting that Christians cannot shrug off the realities of damnation and final judgment, the report says that "sadistically expressed" views of eternal torment and punishment had left "searing psychological scars" on many people. So Hell should now be portrayed as the "choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being".

The Church is not only downsizing Hell but also the palatial surroundings of some its bishops. The Church Commissioners, still reeling from the loss of £800 million in speculative investments, have required the Bishop of Portsmouth to move out of his £1 million mansion because of the prohibitive cost of renovating one of the country's largest thatched houses.

A LIVERPOOL COURT threw out a charge against a man said to be an "obsessive stalker" of the Princess Royal, who admitted he had sexual fantasies about her Bernard Quinn, aged 53, had been following the princess around the country and had reportedly sent her a stream of love letters.

When she visited Liverpool, police spotted Mr Quinn who, they said, showed a "determination" to approach the princess and talk to her. They charged him with conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace. But the magistrate dismissed the charge after a psychiatrist said that, while he was suffering from chronic mental illness, Mr Quinn was unlikely to pose any physical risk to the princess.



Tory backer takes helm at BBC as Hussey goes early

Michael Ellison

A CONSERVATIVE businessman who claimed just over a year ago that he had no future in the media was made chairman of the BBC last week to bolster the Birt revolution.

Sir Christopher Bland, chairman of the transport company NFC and former chairman of London Weekend Television, replaces Marmaduke Hussey, who is stepping down six months early after almost 10 years in the job.

A former colleague of Sir Christopher said: "It's bad news for anyone at the BBC who thought they were going to get a change of regime. He's talented, intelligent and has lots of ability but he can be unnecessarily rough with people."

Sir Christopher, who with his then chief executive Greg Dyke fought a losing battle to keep Granada's hands off LWT, said 14 months ago: "Greg's future is probably in media. Mine is not."

Last week the former Conservative Greater London Council member and ex-chairman of the Bow Group said: "What's changed is that I've been offered this rather good job, the best in broadcasting."

Sir Christopher, who takes over on a five-year contract at the end of March, will be paid £63,670 on top of the £200,000 a year he receives as chairman of NFC.

"My Conservative connections are pretty ancient in the sense that I've not been active in politics for 24 years," he said, adding that he would allow his membership to lapse. "My job will be to defend the independence and impartiality of the BBC." He said the main challenges were competition and changing technology.

Sir Christopher is a friend of John Birt, BBC director-general, whose regime of efficiency populated by outside producers, consultants and soothsayers has enraged many employees. Mr Birt was said to be delighted by the appointment.

Jack Cunningham, the shadow national heritage secretary, said: "It is absolutely essential that he is rigorous about his own and the corporation's political independence at all times."

Broadcasting industry insiders said that Sir Christopher, a former deputy chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, was a professional with a public service background who would get on better with Mr Birt than did his predecessor.

Mr Dyke, a Labour supporter who is now chief executive of Pearson Television, said: "He is a Tory but that never influenced his work. He understands broadcasting inside out, he's tough and independent. I don't see him as a political appointment. He's been appointed because he's the best candidate."

Women-only lists may end

Rebecca Smithers and Martin Wainwright

TONY Blair is considering scrapping all-women shortlists for the 14 constituencies where candidates have still to be chosen, to avoid prolonging confusion over the controversial policy close to the election.

Uncertainty about the future of the lists was triggered by last week's decision by an industrial tribunal in Leeds which ruled the policy illegal, forcing Labour to freeze the selection procedure currently under way for nine seats. A question mark hangs over five other constituencies where selection has not yet started.

Although Labour is considering an appeal, a spokesman stressed last week that it would take no further steps until it has seen the tribunal's written judgment, expected at the end of the month.

A close aide of Mr Blair pointed out that the Labour leader considers the policy "not ideal" and that it would only apply for the next general election. But Mr Blair is understood to be prepared to drop it now, provided that the many legal complexities can be resolved.

The tribunal decision threatens to reopen wounds in Leeds North-East Labour Party, which saw the bitterest of all controversies in a women-only shortlist seat. Local party officials, still smarting over Labour's refusal to endorse leftwinger Liz Davies, are likely to confine their new selection procedure to women, even if unofficially.

3,000 jail jobs axed

Alan Travis

A FRESH political crisis broke over the prison service on Sunday after it was disclosed that nearly 3,000 jobs are to go to meet Treasury cuts in funding over the next three years.

The scale of job losses being sought in the 40,000 prisons workforce shocked prison governors and staff.

Richard Tilt, acting director general, stressed that the Prison Service had to find a way of implementing a Treasury-agreed reduction of 13.3 per cent. "It will be difficult," he said. "It is too soon to say what size of reduction is necessary in staff numbers but we certainly expect some reduction to occur over the next three years."

Opposition MPs, prison governors and penal reformers all expressed fears that the job losses will increase tensions inside Britain's 136 prisons and lead to the erosion of regimes designed to prevent criminals re-offending at a time when the prison population is about to reach a record 53,000 and is rising at 100 a week.

Prison service documents have shown that ministers are preparing to abandon some of the key objectives set by Lord Woolf after the Strangeways riots, and plan to cut the time spent out of cell from 12 hours to eight. Three low-security prisons face closure, and 120 probation jobs and an unspecified number in prison education will be lost.

Chris Scott, chairman of the Prison Governors' Association, warned that jails could not achieve both the "alarming" level of savings required and protect the public as they had done in the past.

Thatcher angers Tory left

Michael White and Patrick Wintour

LADY THATCHER last week reopened the Conservative party's barely-healed wounds following Emma Nicholson's defection by warning John Major against the electoral perils of returning to the moderate "One Nation" Conservatism that she rejected comprehensively during her premiership.

Despite a damage limitation exercise, launched by senior ministers and MPs before the former prime minister's City of London lecture, her devastating — if coded — analysis of the Government's failure to "live up to our analysis and principles" angered the Tory left desperate to stem the so-called lurch to the right.

Dismissing as "baloney" peddled by malcontents suggestions that the Government is in trouble with voters for moving too far to the right, she took sides in the key economic debate by saying: "The test is simple. Just ask yourself: is it because the Government has not spent, borrowed and taxed enough that people are discontented? Or is it that we have gone too far?

"The answer is obvious."

To Mr Major's discomfort she said: "We are unpopular, above all, because the middle classes — and all those who aspire to join the middle classes — feel that they no longer have the incentives and opportunities they expect from a Conservative government."

To make her partisan message abundantly clear, Lady Thatcher went on to say: "I am not sure what is meant by those who say that the party should return to something called One Nation Conservatism. As far as I can tell by their views on European federalism, such people's creed would be better described as 'No Nation Conservatism'."

The divisions exposed by the former prime minister pleased Labour as much as her speech delighted Thatcherite Tories who want to pull Mr Major to the right.

But her barely-concealed message dismayed moderate Tory MPs who were already concerned that Lady Thatcher and her advisers had decided to go ahead with such a potentially divisive lecture after her successor had battled to steady and unite his party in the wake of Emma Nicholson's defection to the Liberal Democrats.

Harlow's Jerry Hayes said she would not be forgiven for "making a virtue of disloyalty".



Yesterday's hero . . . Lady Thatcher warns against One Nation Conservatism during her City of London lecture PHOTO: MARTIN ARGLES

With Mr Major away in Paris attending the memorial service for France's socialist president, François Mitterrand, it fell to his deputy, Michael Heseltine, and the party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, to insist that Lady Thatcher's real message was her "devastating" attack on the Labour leader, Tony Blair, his newly-unveiled "stakeholder society" and zest for high taxes, Europe and constitutional change.

Rightwing Tory MPs were quick to support Lady Thatcher's analysis of the party's problems. "No one can find fault with what she says. People will find this very easy to support," said the rightwinger David Shaw, MP for Dover and Deal.

Thatcher acolytes insisted she had been on her best behaviour, but the ministers Lady Thatcher singled out for praise were — apart from Mr Major — those rightwingers she had invited to be present, Michael Portillo, Peter Lilley, Michael Howard and John Redwood.

Towards the end there was a tough attack on "Old Labour" and on Mr Blair, whom she has previously praised — "by instinct a man of the left" — she said.

Mr Major was quick to reject Lady Thatcher's call to abandon One Nation Conservatism, insisting he would not be deflected from his determination to fight the next election from the centre ground.

Looking relaxed in public, but described as privately livid at Lady Thatcher's latest broadside, John Major later insisted: "We have been a One Nation Conservative Party since the beginning of time and we are now. Who could suggest differently? How could you possibly have a two nation party of any sort?"

His carefully crafted and firm riposte was, in large part, designed to placate the Tory left and prevent her speech acting as the catalyst for further defections. But he avoided any public slight to his one-time patron, saying: "Lady Thatcher is a very important part of the Conservative party. The Conservative party, as I have been saying for a long time, is a broad church."

How to secure a winning hand in Brussels

Paul Brown

TWO bruising decades of fighting Britain's corner in the European Union have prompted Whitehall to issue Brussels-bound civil servants with a detailed guide to survival — Sir Humphrey's tips for coping on the Continent, so to speak.

The guide — written, as it happens, by a British Eurocrat called James Humphreys — warns of "thieves and brigands who lurk in the dark of the forest". It advises negotiators to keep a poker face and never to deal from the bottom of the pack — "they would take it personally".

Published by the Department of the Environment for circulation in Whitehall only, the 250-page guide also contains some adult advice on the strength of Belgian beers, the occupational hazards of lunch, and what to do if stuck in Brussels over the weekend.

Mr Humphreys has just been appointed to the private office of the Environment Minister, James Clappison. Previously he was an environment attaché in Brussels, where he apparently discovered just how many votes there are in Finland, what is the function of jurist-linguists, and which restaurants sell the best *moules frites*.

Despite some of the weird and often difficult experiences recounted in the guide, Mr Humphreys comments: "As civil servants who are also negotiators on behalf of UK interest, we have to use the [European Union] system to our best advantage; this means we must also accept a measure of responsibility for the outcome."

Most of the book is devoted to unravelling jargon, explaining what European institution is responsible for which tasks, who to circulate with reports, and how to get the UK's position across and win the arguments.

Advice is given on negotiations, which should be played as in a game of cards. "Negotiations have a natural, unspoken balance, and the search for compromise is supposed to avoid winners and losers.

"If a point made and secured by another delegation helps the UK, don't show this in a meeting by smiling or thanking that delegation; better to pocket the advantage without comment of any sort and continue to pursue other UK points."

Opposition peers step in to rescue divorce law shake-up

Rebecca Smithers

THE unlikely saviour of the Government's plans to shake up the divorce laws appeared in the guise of the Opposition last week, as the shadow Lord Chancellor said he expected the majority of Labour peers to support the reforms.

Lord Irvine of Lairg was backing the new Family Law Bill as it entered its committee stage in the House of Lords, where it was subjected to a savage attack by Tory peers who fear it will undermine the status of marriage.

Lord Irvine said the bill "does not in practice make divorce easier. On the contrary, it strengthens the institution of marriage much more than the present law."

The rearguard campaign threatened against the bill in the Lords, led by Baroness Young, involves some 200 amendments, including one designed to sweep away the plan for "no fault" divorce by reintroducing adultery and unreasonable behaviour as grounds for divorce.

Although the Government has imposed a two-line whip for the bill's committee stage in the Lords, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, has pledged that peers will be allowed a free vote on the more sensitive elements of the legislation.

Among these is clause seven of the bill, which relates to the 12 months of "reflection and consideration" required before a divorce is granted. At the moment, couples have to wait two years, except in "quickie" divorces.

Government business managers last week moved swiftly to play down suggestions that Lord Mackay has bowed to pressure by being prepared to extend the minimum waiting time to 18 months. In the Lords, Lord Mackay stressed: "The Government's policy on the period remains at one year." But he made it clear that he would "listen carefully to all that is said in Parliament".

Baroness Young told peers that marriage had to be buttressed: "We want to minimise bitterness in divorce. But one of the objectives that we will have to look at is to recognise that it is better still to save the marriage in the first place."

Later Lord Mackay said there was no evidence in the divorce figures since the 1969 Act that relying on fault had in any way been a "restraining factor on the incidence of divorce". But Baroness Young, warning "this isn't a matter which those of us who feel strongly will allow to drop," said she would consider returning at a later stage with proposals to introduce the concept of fault into the bill if the Lord Chancellor did not produce his own. The committee stage was adjourned until later this month.

● The Government is to fund pilot schemes to prepare couples for marriage in an attempt to stem the rising tide of divorces, *writes Clare Dyer*.

A spokeswoman for the Lord Chancellor said he was pledging hundreds of thousands of pounds to try out schemes designed to reduce the number and cost of marriage breakdowns. These would include marriage preparation projects and methods of encouraging couples whose marriages hit trouble to go for counselling early enough to save the relationship.

Organisations such as Relate will be invited to bid for contracts to carry out pilot projects. Relate already does some marriage preparation counselling where the demand exists, but few couples are aware of the service.

The proposal comes from the interdepartmental working party on marriage, set up last July to identify couples' needs for guidance and support.

Announcing the move in the Lords last week, Lord Mackay said that the working party wanted to encourage innovation and variety, because one service would not suit the needs of every couple. It was unclear, for example, whether the needs of step-families and ethnic minority families were being met at present.

UK plan 'illegal', says UN

Alan Travis

GOVERNMENT plans to withdraw welfare benefits from thousands of asylum seekers from February 5 violate Britain's international treaty obligations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has told ministers.

In behind the scenes lobbying, the UNHCR has warned that the proposals confirmed last week by Peter Lilley, the Social Security Secretary, will place the United Kingdom "squarely in violation of several treaty obligations, in particular Article 22 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child".

This article says that states should take all appropriate measures to ensure children seeking refugee status, whether or not they are with their parents, are treated in a humane way while their claims are decided.

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work while their claims are considered, and the UNHCR briefing document says the removal of benefits for most asylum seekers will "inevitably expose large numbers of individuals, including particularly vulnerable groups, to the worst effects of impoverishment."

Legal sources also believe the plans to weaken the appeal rights of asylum seekers tear up undertakings given by the Government to the UN human rights committee.

Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, has repeatedly argued that his new asylum legislation and accompanying restrictions on benefit claims do not conflict with international obligations — but the public disclosure of the UNHCR position shows this is disputed at the highest levels.

For the first time a UNHCR spokesman also publicly voiced concerns over Mr Howard's proposed new legal restrictions on the rights of asylum seekers. Ray Wilkinson, UNHCR spokesman, said he agreed that the Government needed to address abuses of the asylum procedures, but he voiced concern that several aspects of the current legislation would penalise genuine asylum seekers as well as bogus ones.

"We believe some aspects of the bill are focused on restricting access to the asylum process rather than actually helping applicants. This may make it difficult for genuine refugees to enter the process."

NHS faces 'lethal cocktail of problems'

Chris Mihill

A SHORTAGE of hospital beds has combined with staff shortages, a misplaced government policy on waiting lists and a failure of community care to produce "a potentially lethal cocktail of problems" in the National Health Service, the chairman of the British Medical Association said last week.

Dr Sandy Macara revealed that some hospitals had come close to treating patients on the floor after running out of trolleys as well as beds during peak periods of the latest admissions crisis over Christmas and the New Year.

One hospital was reduced to treating patients in ambulances parked outside the unit, and many others had cancelled routine surgery to cope with emergency admissions. Some family doctors were spending hours on the telephone trying to get their patients admitted to medical or surgical wards.

The BMA said a consistent rundown of beds over recent years had left the hospital system unable to cope with seasonal fluctuations in admissions caused by flu, falls, respiratory problems and other winter illnesses. Some units faced staff shortages, so even where beds were available they could not be used for a lack of trained personnel. Many "acute" beds — used for medical and surgical cases — were being blocked by elderly patients or the mentally ill who could not be sent home because of a lack of care in the community.

In other cases the Government's drive to reduce waiting lists was distorting priorities, so that emergency patients had to wait on trolleys while non-urgent patients had operations in order to meet waiting list targets.

Bed shortages were highlighted in Scotland, Wales, Bristol, Southampton, Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Liverpool, Sheffield, Birmingham, Nottingham and throughout London.

One consultant in Nottingham dealt with 95 emergency admissions in one day; at the St Helier Hospital, Carshalton, Surrey, 26 patients were put on trolleys in the accident and emergency department and some patients were treated in ambulances.

Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell said there were enough beds, but they needed to be managed effectively. The fall in bed numbers over recent years had happened because modern medicine, with procedures such as day surgery, meant fewer beds were needed. According to BMA figures, 9,000 acute beds have been closed in England over the past five years, and 31,000 since 1984. The total number of beds dropped from 335,000 in 1984 to 212,000 in 1994/95.

Dr Macara said: "There is a shortage of staff because so many youngsters are fed up. There's a disastrous shortfall in community care — there's community neglect masquerading as community care. There are not enough resources."

● The case of a 65-year-old heart attack victim who died after at least 10 hospitals were unable to find him an intensive care bed, prompted a call for a government inquiry. The unnamed man died last week in Scarborough Hospital, North Yorkshire, after staff 80 miles away at Bradford Royal Infirmary, where he was admitted after collapsing in a doctor's surgery, struggled for nearly three hours to find him a bed.

All five of BRI's beds were taken and calls to hospitals in Sheffield, Hull, Leeds and Wakefield failed to find him a place. A spare bed was found in Scarborough where he was airlifted, but he died 20 minutes after being admitted.

Labour health spokeswoman Harriet Harman wrote to Mr Dorrell demanding an inquiry. A spokesman for Bradford Hospitals Trust said staff regretted what had happened, and talks were under way with the health authority to accelerate the provision of another £125,000 intensive care bed.



Railtrack returned Waterloo station's famous Edwardian clock to its home last week, 30ft above the main concourse, after three months of meticulous refurbishment. The complete overhaul and restoration, funded jointly by Railtrack and the Railway Heritage Trust, used authentic techniques and materials to re-establish the clock's inimitable style PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM TURNER

Police call for tougher line on young criminals

Martin Wainwright

ONE of Britain's busiest police forces last week vented its frustration with the criminal justice system by calling for a harder approach to persistent young offenders.

Chief officers of Northumbria police urged legal changes to speed the judicial process and allow wider detention of young criminals before court hearings to prevent re-offending.

The move was prompted by research by the force showing an exceptional rate of burglary and car theft by a very small but relentlessly criminal group of adolescents.

Cases like the "Spider Boy" of Newcastle upon Tyne, who repeatedly offended from his refuge in a warren of pipes and air ducts, had exposed limitations in the criminal justice system, the force said. A sample of 35 youths arrested last year on 10 or more occasions showed they had been held 639 times for a total of more than 1,300 crimes.

"Our findings show that if you do not keep the nucleus of prolific offenders in custody they go straight out and commit a wide variety of further offences and often draw other young people into crime," said Alan Brown, the assistant chief constable. "It is obvious that if we don't devise a way to deal with them quickly their criminal careers progress at a terrifying pace."

He added: "A small core is responsible for a really alarming amount of crime."

The changes would extend the present system, which allows the remand of young people into police custody only in "extreme circumstances" — but it could also require an expensive extension of secure detention units.

Mr Brown said a proposed "fast track" system for getting persistent young offenders to trial was under discussion with other criminal justice agencies in the region.

● Many of the youngest suspects arrested for street robbery are youths excluded from school, the Metropolitan police commissioner said. A meeting of black community leaders, police officers and representatives of the social and youth services agreed school exclusions played a major part in crime and had to be addressed.

Jobs axed at Opera House

THE jobs of up to 110 singers, musicians, technicians and front of house staff are to be axed at the Royal Opera House to offset a projected overspend of £2 million, *write Helen Nowicka and Gary Younge.*

Jeremy Isaacs, general director, announced the redundancies last week at a meeting with most of the 950 staff at Covent Garden. He said the ROH had maximised the revenue it received from box office sales.

"Reluctantly and regrettably", after reducing costs in other areas, he had no option but to cut staff.

Mr Isaacs said the cuts are the result of a commitment to the Arts Council to balance the books for the 1996/97 financial year at a time when public subsidies and private sponsorship were in decline. A quarter of the ROH's income comes from public subsidy compared with half during 1991. In Berlin the proportion is 86.8 per cent, and in Vienna 76.7 per cent.

In the current financial year the ROH will receive an Arts Council grant of £8.11 million. The annual wages bill — the single largest cost — is £23 million.

Fright at the opera, page 27

Charity to begin at home

Madeleine Bunting

ONE of the main Christian overseas aid agencies is to use a third of its resources to tackle social disintegration in Britain. It believes poverty in some inner cities may be as bad as in the Third World.

Tear Fund, a development and aid agency, has combined forces with the Evangelical Alliance to launch a £10 million campaign which aims to support 80 projects by the end of the year.

UK Action will finance community projects run by evangelical churches for the elderly and the long-term unemployed. In wealthier areas, it will fund projects tackling family breakdown and drug abuse.

Sir Fred Catherwood, president of the Evangelical Alliance and a former director-general of the National Economic Development Council, believes a "tidal wave of human disaster is now swamping the social services".

He said: "I have been appalled by the rise of a new poverty-stricken underclass, including homeless teenagers sleeping in cardboard boxes . . . Christians must do all we can to help a state which doesn't know what has hit it, to look after the victims."

UK Action's launch reinforces the trend among many of the biggest overseas aid agencies, such as Oxfam and Save the Children, of devoting a significant proportion of their fundraising to ease deteriorating social conditions in Britain.

The Evangelical Alliance — which represents about one million Christians — is lining up with denominations such as the Church of England and the Methodists, which have perceived the need for social action for their religious credibility.

UK Action's manager, David Evans, said the poor had got poorer over the past 30 years. "The impact of poverty in some of our inner cities is the same as in parts of the Third World — a loss of hope, and a lack of choice and control over personal circumstances."

Sir Fred said some social problems — such as drug addiction and alcoholism — were better tackled by the Church than the state because it could offer a moral framework, but added that the purpose of UK Action was to help individuals, "not enrol them in a club".

TV exposure damages children's speech

Sarah Boseley

TOO much television is stunting the language development of middle-class children as well as those from deprived inner-city areas, according to a leading speech therapist.

Dr Sally Ward, who is considered the country's leading authority on the speech development of young children, believes babies under one year old should not watch television or videos at all. Children of two or three should watch for no more than an hour a day.

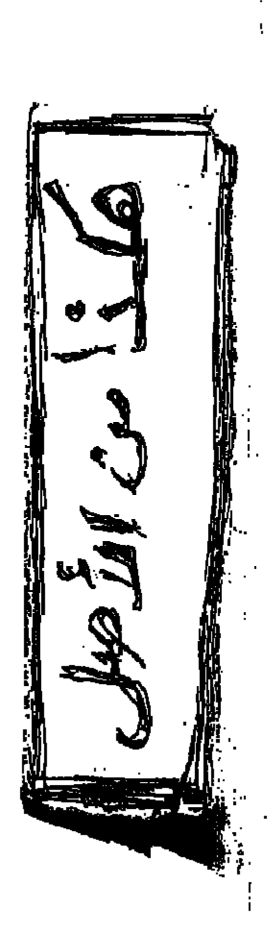
Dr Ward's 10-year study of babies and toddlers in inner-city Manchester showed television was a very important factor in delaying the speech development of the one in five children found to have problems. The background noise from televisions stopped them learning to talk as early as they should. At eight months, they neither recognised their names nor basic words like "juice" and "bricks". At three, they had the language of two-year-olds.

Now she has found that children from well-to-do families at her London clinic are being handicapped in the same way. "The television is being used as a babysitter, with nannies particularly. Some of these middle-class children are spending far too much time watching television and videos.

"They get very fixed on the colours and flashing lights. They are riveted by the screen. We found in our study it was quite difficult to get them interested in toys."

All the evidence showed, said Dr Ward, that children whose language was below standard at the age of three could be set back for life. "They are likely to be educational failures and failures in all sorts of ways. They will go to school with depressed language levels and the whole educational progress is held back."

In her Manchester study, Dr Ward found that parents who were taught to turn off the television and talk to their children could quickly repair the damage. Babies of nine months would be back on course within four months.



Scargill party set for byelection

Seumas Milne and Patrick Wintour

ARTHUR SCARGILL'S fledgling Socialist Labour Party is set to run a candidate in next month's Hemsworth byelection, it emerged at the weekend. Meanwhile, Labour opponents of proportional representation warned Tony Blair that electoral reform could throw the new organisation a lifeline.

The Labour leader dismissed the challenge from the country's best-known trade unionist but promised he did not intend to drive the left from the Labour party.

Discussing Mr Scargill's move, Mr Blair said that it was about "two different visions".

"One is of old-style state control, nationalisation, collective power of the old sort, whereas my view is that the Labour party is grouped around a set of values." That was "why New Labour was born".

The miners' president in turn accused Mr Blair of embracing the "devil" of capitalism and the free market, and doing more to destroy socialism than Lady Thatcher. He said it was incomprehensible socialists should want to stay with New Labour.

Labour officials, who have been monitoring Mr Scargill's plans, are confident there will be no heavyweight party or union defections.

Mr Blair cited the miners' leader's departure as proof that "Labour has changed in opposition and will remain changed in government".

Labour MPs opposed to electoral reform seized on the new party as a weapon in their battle against growing support for proportional representation — the party is currently committed to a referendum — saying it could allow Mr Scargill on to the national stage and undermine a future Labour government.

Derek Fatchett, Labour MP for Leeds Central and a shadow defence minister, said that proportional representation led to fragmentation and support for extremist parties, and his PR-supporting colleagues "would do well to bear that in mind when considering the prospects of Arthur Scargill".

The first test for Socialist Labour is now likely to take place before its proper launch, in the Hemsworth byelection on February 1, in a traditional mining constituency, where the National Union of Mineworkers' nominee has been banned from standing as Labour candidate for the second time in four years.

A spokesman for the SLP founding group said it was now "odds-on" that it would field a candidate. Membership cards are already being issued and a conference to discuss policy will be held on March 2. The formal launch will be on May Day, followed by a congress on May 11.

● Conservative MPs were relieved this week at the expected return to the fold of the arch-Eurosceptic, Sir Richard Body. But they were bracing themselves for a cliff-hanger over billionaire financier Sir James Goldsmith's intention to field Referendum Party candidates against key Tories in the coming election.

Comment, page 12

Protesters stop work at bypass site

Alex Bellos

THE so-called Third Battle of Newbury began in earnest last week when roads protesters halted several days of construction of the town's controversial bypass.

Building work was unable to begin on Tuesday last week because 30 activists immobilised 400 security guards, brought in to protect the workers, by blocking the road at the guards' assembly point near Reading, 20 miles away.

The protesters said they knew about the site because a friend had applied for a job with a security firm and had been taken there the day before.

As soon as seven coaches arrived at the farm to take the guards out, two five-metre-high metal tripods were set up in the road at either side of the farm gates.

Police were called but the protesters on the tripods refused to come down until seven hours later. By that time the Highways Agency had called off work for the day.

Action continued into this week with several arrests every day. Trees were felled with chainsaws at two sites before enough demonstrators gathered to disrupt the cutting. The use of mobile chainsaw crews led to a large number of arrests with 20 protesters taken to Newbury police station on Monday.

Most of them were held for alleged aggravated trespass, introduced last year in the Criminal Justice Act. The charge was brought in primarily to deal with hunt saboteurs, but it has been used to a limited extent in other road protests. A cornerstone of the Act, it has been consistently attacked by civil rights groups as undemocratic.

John Wadham, director of Liberty, said: "Peaceful protest is a fundamental right which is seriously undermined by the Criminal Justice Act. The use by the police of these powers shows how fragile those rights are without a Bill of Rights to protect them."

Thames Valley Police have joined the Hampshire force to oversee the building of the bypass. The extra policing will cost between £30,000 and £35,000 a week.

Protesters and security men in one of last week's clashes, claimed as a triumph for the environmentalists PHOTOGRAPH: GARRY WEASER

New defenders, page 25

Sinn Fein at odds over assembly

David Sharrock

SINN FEIN was at odds with itself last week after senior officials issued contradictory views on Unionist proposals for a new Northern Ireland assembly as a way to break the political deadlock.

The Sinn Fein chairman, Mitchel McLaughlin, said it would seriously consider taking part in an elected talks forum, after reports circulated in London that John Major is considering plans for a 45-seat negotiating body — half the size of the assembly envisaged by the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble.

Mr McLaughlin said: "Obviously, negotiating delegations selected by the parties would be a better idea, but a proposal for a 45-member forum that would not just be another talking shop would go some way to meeting Sinn Fein's requirements for all-party talks and would be more workable than any 90-member body."

Sinn Fein's president, Gerry Adams, flatly rejected involvement in such a plan, describing as a "non-runner" any "return to a Stormont assembly . . . or indeed any variation of the proposals from Mr Trimble".

Mr McLaughlin later denied there was any difference between his and Mr Adams's position. "Maybe we were answering different questions," he said. "We will certainly give any fresh proposals due consideration."

Mr Adams was speaking in Dublin after meeting the international body on illegal arms. The body, led by President Clinton's special envoy George Mitchell, rejected suggestions that his report would recommend a new assembly as a means of breaking the talks impasse.

Mr Mitchell said he had not yet made any decisions. "Until we complete our work, any report to the contrary is incorrect." He also met the SDLP leader, John Hume.

The Irish prime minister, John Bruton, also ruled out any new assembly being proposed by Mr Mitchell. Mr Bruton said the matter was one for discussion in the political track of the current process.

Mr McLaughlin's comments — before they were contradicted by his senior colleague — are the first time that Sinn Fein has signalled that it is seriously interested in fresh elections.

Miners win High Court battle

BRITISH COAL faces an avalanche of industrial disease compensation bills, which could run into hundreds of millions of pounds, after a landmark ruling in the High Court on Monday, *write Martin Wainwright and Seumas Milne.*

The government, owners of what is now a shell company, will pick up the bill.

A judge's decision that British Coal failed to monitor Vibration White Finger — a condition caused by long-term use of vibrating machinery — is likely to lead to more than 100,000 claims by miners.

Fall-out from the decision could also affect manufacturing, farming and forestry business where drills, pneumatic picks and similar equipment are regularly used.

The ruling was hailed as a "tremendous victory" by Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, which largely funded the test action by nine former miners from the North-east. He claimed up to £500 million of damages could be involved.

Vibration White Finger, also known as "dead hand" involves a gradual draining of blood supply to the hands leading to nerve damage, loss of sensation, and acute pain during intermittent attacks.

Ian Lavery, NUM area secretary in Northumberland, where 5,000 claims are being prepared, said: "Sufferers end up unable to use their fingers or handle small objects. They can't pick up keys or do up buttons or zips. The worst cases never work again."

The corporation, which is now a shell company, selling its portfolio of land and buildings, is expected to appeal against the decision, delaying any compensation payments.

A spokesman said the legal battle had been justified, because the judge had rejected the miners' claim that action should have been taken by 1969, instead deciding the earliest date should be 1975.

In Brief

THE Government faced further embarrassment over the Saudi dissident, Mohammed al-Mas'ari, when his supporters applied for a television licence to broadcast anti-regime polemics into Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the BBC announced that its Arabic language service's coverage of the case has been repeatedly censored by the Saudi-owned satellite relay station.

POLICE investigating the murder of French student Celine Figard have a DNA sample of the man who abducted her. It does not match any taken in connection with the unsolved murders of other young women, which is seen as evidence against the theory of a serial killer.

THE Princess of Wales created fresh political controversy when she appeared to side with two Labour MPs who attacked the Government's treatment of young people leaving care.

FRANK SKUSE, the former Home Office forensic scientist, is seeking £1 million damages from the eminent libel lawyers Peter Carter-Ruck and Partners over their handling of a libel case in the unsafe convictions of the Birmingham Six.

SHOTS were fired at the police and Customs officers in south-east London as they seized a record 18 tonnes of herbal cannabis worth £55 million.

ARMED robbers stole up to £5 million by convincing a post office worker in East Sussex that they had taken his wife and children hostage.

A CONSORTIUM led by an Illinois-based company is set to take over all three of British Rail's freight operations, leading to calls that the Tories are establishing a private sector monopoly and endangering jobs.

THE Government's tax take as a proportion of national income has been higher than under the last Labour administration in all but one of the past 16 years, according to figures supplied to Labour MP Hugh Bayley by the House of Commons library.

THE NATIONAL Lottery is to be the subject of an inquiry by the National Heritage, following the spate of criticism about its administration by Camelot.

BARRISTERS have narrowly approved a complaints system allowing clients to claim up to £2,000 compensation for "inadequate professional services".

A BLACK barrister has launched an unprecedented legal action accusing her senior clerk and some of the other barristers in her chambers of race discrimination and victimisation.

Gulf war: getting closer to the truth

ONLY five years have passed since the Gulf war. Yet in those five years the public picture of what happened in the West's most demanding post-Vietnam military operation has altered dramatically. Several of the important gaps are being filled in by the BBC's current Gulf war documentary series, although many questions still remain unanswered, even there.

Nevertheless the documentaries are a significant public event and deserve to provoke wide debates. Perhaps the most important underlying concession in the BBC series is about why the war was actually fought. At the time, and in Mrs Thatcher's rhetoric in particular, the Gulf war was full of echoes of the fight against Hitler. Coming as it did in the 50th summer after the Battle of Britain, the invasion of Kuwait inevitably triggered the reaction that aggression should be resisted and appeasement spurned. Yet Kuwait was not Poland. In reality the Gulf war was fought about oil, as General Brent Scowcroft admitted in the first programme. By invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein put himself in control of a fifth of the world's oil and in a position, if he invaded Saudi Arabia, to control twice that amount. That was a legitimate reason for going to war with Iraq — but it wasn't the reason that was advanced at the time.

The second big insight provided by the series was the confirmation in the second programme that Iraqi Scud missiles were far more successful in reality than anyone admitted at the time. In 1991 the world — and the Israeli public in particular — was constantly informed that the Patriot missiles were matching the incoming Scud attack. The Patriot became a symbol of allied resistance. President Bush lauded it as the Scudbuster. Yet in reality it was no such thing. As the former Israeli defence minister Moshe Arens now publicly admits, not a single Patriot brought down a single Scud.

The Patriot is not the only myth. The last-ditch diplomatic meetings in Geneva before the expiry of the UN ultimatum turn out to have been a necessary sham to win the last three or four pro-war votes in the US Congress rather than a real chance of a negotiated peace. The majority reaction in the White House to Saddam's invasion was that the US could live with it, rather than that they must repel it; influenced by the unpopularity of Vietnam, Colin Powell wanted to give sanctions two years to bite before mounting a military response.

The BBC series has its critics, and it is certainly not the last word on the Gulf war. Nevertheless it is public interest television of a high order. Reassessments of this kind should make us pause. Wars cannot be fought without official lies and real people face real death unless the truth is concealed from the enemy at the time. But we need to beware of taking our own propaganda too seriously afterwards. Five years on, the true lessons of the Gulf war are of far more than just historical interest.

The hawks v the lone wolf

BORIS YELTSIN has been demanding more "explanations" over Chechenia from his generals. If he could explain what Russian policy has been trying to achieve there over the past year, his outrage might be more convincing. At the end of December 1994, Mr Yeltsin emerged from hospital to order a halt to bombing raids on civilian Chechen areas — resumed the next day when an orphanage was destroyed. This time Russian forces have been on the receiving end, wholly outmanoeuvred in a daring raid staged by Chechen "lone wolf" fighters into the neighbouring republic of Dagestan. But the question remains: what is the Russian aim in Chechenia and is there the slightest hope of it being achieved?

The military accord signed in July, which provided for the withdrawal of Russian troops and the surrender of weapons by Chechen fighters, was shaky from the start. The Chechen side was certainly not an innocent party: few weapons were surrendered and areas vacated by the Russian army were re-occupied by local gunmen.

But the Russian army showed its impatience early on with the agreement. Civilians continued to die and there was little effort to win hearts and minds. After an assassination attempt in September on Mr Yeltsin's envoy, the Kremlin hawks appear to have persuaded him that the military option should be resumed. Within weeks the defence and interior ministry forces were once again waging war without effective political control by the president or authorisation by the Russian Duma. They have been singularly ineffective: assassination attempts and ambushes have continued at regular intervals and the flow of body bags has resumed. In December Mr Yeltsin signalled a definitive end to seeking a negotiated solution by ordering elections for a new regional government in Chechenia to coincide with the national parliamentary elections. This was an empty exercise, criticised as "premature" by the OSCE mission which was trying to broker a deal. Even Moscow's own man in Chechenia, the former Communist Doku Zavgayev, was dubious at first. The elections set off a new bout of fighting as rebels occupied the second largest city of Gudermes on the eve of a meaningless poll.

The kinder view of Mr Yeltsin is that he has been unable to work out a consistent way of tackling an almost insuperable problem. The darker interpretation, shared by quite a few Russians, is that renewed war in Chechenia may suit his purpose in a year of presidential elections which he might prefer to see postponed.

Scargill exits, stage left

ARTHUR SCARGILL is a man of historic importance, though not for the reasons that he appears to imagine. He believes that he and the National Union of Mineworkers have stood true to the good old cause while all around them have sold out. Most of the rest of us believe that he has been a disaster, hastening the defeat of causes which he genuinely holds dear because of his tragically rigid obsessions and inflexible political style. Yet even today, when both Mr Scargill and the NUM are shadows of what they once were, he commands a sort of grudging attention.

His break with Labour is an emblematic moment of great resonance. By and large, leftwing members of the Labour party are not quitters. For most of this century the left struggled to join the Labour party, even when Labour — with bans and proscriptions aimed mainly at Communists and fellow-travellers — tried its damnedest to keep them out. Mr Scargill's departure marks a change in that tide. In contrast with the Trotskyist entryists of the 1970s and 1980s who had to be prised out of the party at enormous expense, Mr Scargill and whoever follows him have simply gone because the party has become intolerable to them.

Mr Scargill's departure is without question Tony Blair's triumph. The Labour leader has achieved, without really trying, what Neil Kinnock would have sacrificed almost anything to do. But it is a testament to the radicalism of the Blair revolution that the man who could bring the Labour party conference to its feet a decade ago should now walk out with so few supporters and so little fight.

Mr Scargill's party is a doomed project. Its agenda is narrow and dogmatic, its organisation on the ground is weak, and its electoral chances are nullified not just by lack of support but by a first-past-the-post system under which no non-nationalist party has defeated Labour from the left in a single parliamentary seat since 1950. This is not to say that it will be without interested well-wishers or even, at some distant future stage, electoral influence, especially if it manages to mobilise the undoubted red-green stratum in British politics. But don't count on that. If Britain had a proportional representation system the green left might do moderately well, as it has elsewhere in Europe, though there are many differences between the situations on the Continent and in the UK. But it is unbelievable that the creation of a party led by Mr Scargill will make PR more attractive to a sceptical Labour leadership, and it is hard to see so sectarian a figure as Mr Scargill as the natural leader of such a red-green coalition.

The reality is that the left, even though weak, remains mostly as committed as ever to remaining within the Labour party. Mr Scargill's revolutionary syndicalism is untypical, especially of the post-1968 left. This left expects to prosper not weaken under a Labour government, particularly if and when a Blair government embarks on policies which are strongly opposed within the unions. Experience, and some growing evidence, suggests that this could happen.

Hong Kong at the mercy of the dragon

Martin Woollacott

GIVE it back to the Chinese? Never heard anything more ridiculous in my life! That was the kind of colonially choleric reaction which the idea of restoring Hong Kong to China evoked on the terrace of the Repulse Bay Hotel when it first became a public issue in the early seventies. There, looking down on the waters where British warships first anchored, some found it impossible to contemplate such a reversal of fortunes.

But, as time went on, most people agreed that the new idea had one great merit. It aimed at the same object as the policy of staying-on would have done — the continuation of a somewhat separate, western-connected Hong Kong — but, because it conceded Chinese sovereignty, it would, supposedly, allow the process of reversion to be controlled. It ruled out other, perhaps far-fetched, but nevertheless chilling scenarios: an invasion by the People's Liberation Army, a siege, or riot and rebellion in Hong Kong itself.

Resistance to such pressures had already been figurative rather than real — even in the fifties, when Britain maintained a division in Hong Kong. Later, with a vastly diminished garrison, it became a joke. Hong Kong could never be held, that was certain. Indeed, the very act of trying to hold it against the Chinese would signal the end of Hong Kong, because it would mean that the economic relationship which underpinned the city state would be over.

Thus it was that Britain devised the policy of handing Hong Kong back, which led to Margaret Thatcher, not entirely convinced, and Deng Xiaoping, not entirely certain of Britain's motives, signing their agreement. But, after Malcolm Rifkind's difficult week in China, it has to be said that the clever notion that Britain and Hong Kong could control the integration of the territory looks even more ragged than it has done since Chris Patten's reforms first enraged Beijing three and a half years ago. Indeed, it is not so much ragged as gone with the wind.

The Chinese are in command and they are quite capable of steering Hong Kong into disaster. Impervious to argument, unfamiliar with the very concept of compromise, ever on the lookout for ways to signal their total power over all Chinese citizens, they could turn 1996 into the year in which Hong Kong begins to die. Britain can do very little about it. In Beijing, Mr Rifkind has got nothing out of the Chinese on Hong Kong except promises to unblock one infrastructural project.

No amount of pleasant patter after meetings can conceal the fact that the Chinese have moved not one inch on their plan to dismantle the Hong Kong legislature, that they will continue to snub Patten, and that they will continue to ignore the most important political forces in the territory.

This became clear with the publication in December of the names of those who will serve on the new 150-strong preparatory committee. They include not a single member of the Democracy Party, Hong Kong's largest party, and only 14 members of the existing legislature.

This was an outrageous decision, proof of China's preoccupation with establishing dominance. If you rebel, you will be punished, no matter how many votes you got or how many people you represent: that is the message. The committee has about it, like much else of what the Chinese are doing in Hong Kong, the smell of a deal between local capitalists and big Chinese operators in the Party, the ministries, the regional government, and the armed forces.

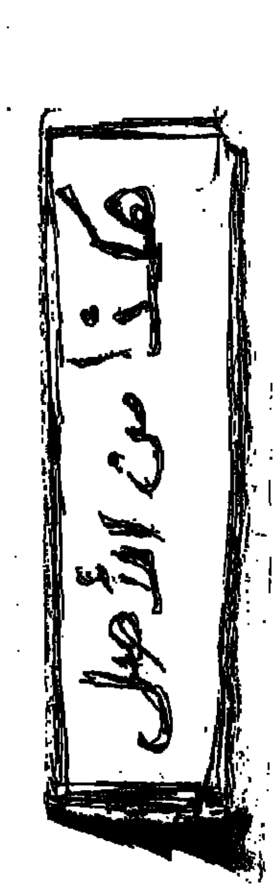
This is the kind of power play the Chinese understand, that between institutional heavyweights looking for part of any action that is going. And, in this play, local tycoons, as well as a few local politicians effective in "leading" public opinion, have their parts. There are not just two sides in the Hong Kong problem. Hong Kong itself is, of course, divided. But it is more important to understand that converging on Hong Kong from the Chinese side are a host of Chinese actors, sometimes rivals and sometimes allies, covetous of the territory's riches, looking for their share and anxious to deny shares to others, and seeing Hong Kong as a new square on the all-China political chequer board. True autonomy worries them, because it would hamper the making of offers impossible to refuse, the scooping up of local partners, the scooping of Chinese rivals.

IT IS a corrupt scramble of this kind, pulling Hong Kong into the wider struggles of a disturbed China, that Chris Patten has all along said it was critical to prevent. Greater democracy and genuine autonomy were, in his view, linked barriers against it, but Rifkind's trip is the final confirmation that the Patten plan has fallen short of its purpose. Whether enough remains for Hong Kong to survive the transition in recognisable form is questionable.

One estimate suggests that 3 million people, half of those living in Hong Kong, might be able to leave if they wished to. Some are expatriates, some are Hong Kong Chinese with the right of residence elsewhere, the bulk are Hong Kong families with close relatives in Canada, the United States, Australia and Britain. It is their decisions which matter now. If they begin to pull out in large numbers during 1996, the Chinese will be to blame, and the Hong Kong that they take over in 1997 will be a shadow of its former self.

Only a few Hong Kong people will make their decisions about staying or leaving on the basis of democratic ideals. But they will make them on the basis of whether Hong Kong is going to be a reasonable place to live and do business in, or a cockpit of contending Chinese interests under the thin cover of a sham autonomy.

Larry Yung, the head of a major Chinese-controlled investment corporation, who has been in Hong Kong since 1978, may have gone native, or may be playing a long game. But, in an interview last month, he put the problem succinctly. "The general thinking", he said, "is that if China allows [interference in Hong Kong], then investment will be down, confidence will be lost, and Hong Kong will go down." Is anybody in Beijing listening?



Where UN angels feared to tread

Philippe Morillon, one time commander of UN forces in Sarajevo and of Nato's Rapid Reaction Force, tells **Ed Vulliamy** of Bosnia policy failings

ON THE day that the peace treaty ending Bosnia's war was signed in Paris, last December 14, one of the more flamboyant characters to emerge from the carnage ended his own distinguished career as a soldier.

The figure of General Philippe Morillon had been etched into Bosnian history since his arrival in the enclave of Srebrenica, during the first bloody debacle in that town, which led to its subsequent, perverse designation as a "safe area" in spring 1993. He became an overnight hero; the main street was renamed in his honour.

The following July, Gen Morillon warned that only a decisive show of force from the West could forge a peace, otherwise Bosnia would become "a series of Gaza strips, ruled through fear". That show of force was still two more years away.

Gen Morillon, a veteran of Algeria in the early 1960s, was a natural choice for a role in the UN's Balkan effort. He had spent two years with the Yugoslav army as an envoy from the French defence ministry, and knew many of its senior officers when it split into Croat, Bosnian and — mainly — Serbian columns.

In October 1991, Gen Morillon was included in a secret seminar held in Metz by senior officers from the armed forces of the Western European Union, gathered to consider options for Croatia. The session's recommendation to the European Community and UN was for a "rapid reaction force", equipped with attack helicopters and tanks, and with a mandate to "assert its authority" and hold the ravaging of Yugoslavia in check through military force.

Gen Morillon was an enthusiastic proponent of the report, but it was discarded and buried. Instead, he found himself second-in-command to the Egyptian general Satish Nambiar at the UN Protection Force (Unprofor) headquarters in Sarajevo, chosen for its equidistance between Zagreb and Belgrade. Gen Morillon was convinced that "something totally different from traditional UN peacekeeping" was required.

When the Bosnian hurricane began to blow, the Sarajevo team was faced with a decision either to evacuate or expand the mandate. "I said we *must* have a mandate for Bosnia . . . We were reacting blow by blow, without sufficient liaison with New York, or the Community or even each other." The Unprofor HQ was moved from Sarajevo.

Gen Morillon returned to the Bosnian capital in August 1992, with a mandate to open the airport and secure the humanitarian aid bridge to Split. He was among those urging a broader brief to cover the whole of Bosnia.

He says: "There was a confusion of aims, between two ideas: we had to be impartial, and I was impartial. But not *neutral*. They are not the same thing. My motto is: 'only passivity is dishonourable' — the way I understood my mission was to oppose everything to do with ethnic cleansing. We could mediate, but we had to be resolutely opposed to the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing.



Man of action . . . General Morillon's stand in defending Srebrenica won respect but was ultimately futile

New York's understanding was this 'angel-ism', this illusion that we could remain passive."

Immediately, a rift opened between Gen Morillon's ambitions on the ground, and those of the UN *angelistes*. The disagreement was fundamental, over who the "Protection Force" was in Bosnia to protect.

"The idea", says Gen Morillon, "that we were only there to protect ourselves, our soldiers, was unacceptable to me. This was the reason I had so many crises of anger — I was angry with people talking to me about the mandate all the time. We wanted nothing to do with the mandate, but with the *spirit* of our mission . . . which was to protect the population.

'The idea that we were only there to protect ourselves, our soldiers, was unacceptable'

"It was my permanent instinct — we have to use force. And that is the reason I was so angry when, after my departure, authorisation was given to every side to control our convoys. If you accept such control, you have no role to play, and should pull out."

The UN Security Council's resolutions were, says Gen Morillon, "like the Koran — everything was there, including its opposite." But in terms of military authority, the mission was undersold.

From retirement, Gen Morillon lambasts the mandate's rules of engagement: "To limit our ability to fire only when fired upon was much too restricted," he says. "The idea of the 'right to legitimate defence' was a farce."

Gen Morillon shared this view with the officer commanding the first British contingent to arrive in Bosnia, Colonel Bob Stewart, who promised: "I won't be forced off any road," and said he would regard any militia that interrupted the delivery of aid as "the enemy".

Such a position raised eyebrows in Whitehall, and at Zagreb command. Col Stewart was considered wild and rash — but, says Gen Morillon, "Stewart was right. I tried to back him all the way."

The French in Sarajevo took the greatest number of casualties among the UN contingents. Gen Morillon blames not only the rules of engagement, but a lack of adequate protection.

He says it took him "an absurd amount of time just to get sufficient armour". To deploy adequate armoured vehicles in Sarajevo, he says — referring to the nadir of the French presence — "I had to wait for the assassination of the Bosnian deputy prime minister [Hakija Turajlic, shot at a Serb roadblock inside a French patrol vehicle] while he was escorted by my men. It was a drama for me to to find solace for myself after that."

By contrast, Srebrenica, March 1993, was Gen Morillon's hour. He recalls it with a pleasant immodesty.

As Serb artillery pounded the town, Gen Morillon helicoptered into Srebrenica in a gesture of solidarity and ended up staying for several days as residents prevented him from leaving.

He braved the guns and promised the people he would stay among them until their security was guaranteed. He now knows he was actually a hostage of the Bosnian government.

"I tried to escape at night," he says, "but it was the sight of hundreds of people, women and old people and children, coming in through the snow from the places that had fallen, that made me realise I had no choice but to stay."

The outcome was the first "safe area", bloodily overrun, with thousands murdered, in July 1994. The safe area was what Gen Morillon required of himself in order to leave the town, but it was not what he regarded as the solution. "As far as I was concerned, it was a temporary expedient to protect the town until the implementation of the Vance-Owen plan. For Srebrenica to become an Indian reservation for two-and-a-half years was not what I had in mind."

Gen Morillon had learned early on who his main adversary would be. Upon taking command in Sarajevo, he spawned a cunning scheme to break the siege: to establish Unprofor's headquarters in the Serb-held suburb of Ilidza. Ilidza, he says, "was the gateway to Sarajevo, key to the city. I did not want the airport, I wanted Ilidza."

It was here that the Serbs were later to erect roadblocks which closed the tarmac aid route into the capital from Split, Mostar and the west, thereby tying the noose.

Gen Morillon tempted and flattered the Bosnian Serb president, Radovan Karadzic, with the idea of quartering Unprofor in a Serbian neighbourhood. The mayor of Ilidza was also delighted at the prospect of the hard currency following in Unprofor's slipstream. But the plan was quashed by the one man who saw through it: Gen Mladic.

Such was Gen Mladic's authority that President Milosevic himself was a hostage to the Bosnian Serb general. "He was his prisoner, and remained so until summer 1995."

Gen Mladic enjoyed the loyalty of not just the Bosnian Serbs but the whole Serbian army, Gen Morillon says.

So, I asked him, the Serbian army was definitely fighting in Bosnia, for all Mr Milosevic's undertakings that the Drina blockade that would throttle his Bosnian Serb brothers?

"When I went to see Milosevic," says Gen Morillon, "I spoke to him about this. He was obliged to admit to me that they were involved; he couldn't deny it. The Serbian army was in there until May 1995."

This is the first testimony of a confession by President Milosevic that his own troops were engaged.

By the time Gen Morillon left Sarajevo in 1993, he says, "I felt the threat of powerlessness" in the UN mission.

"There was conflict between Zagreb and Sarajevo" says Gen Morillon. "Relations with Zagreb were usually by phone, and from time to time there were angry crises. I repeated it every day: 'We have to be respected! If not, we have to withdraw.' I considered them functionaries; we were on the ground."

Zagreb, he adds, "was under the influence of 'angel-ism', 40 years of peacekeeping traditions. They were frightened we would become involved in a disaster like Somalia. They were terrified of the UN being seen as partial. They failed to understand the difference between impartiality and neutrality."

This past summer, "the defining moment" of bombardment around Sarajevo, was "exactly what I had been waiting for since the very beginning" says Gen Morillon.

The attack which finally forced the Serbs to the negotiating table was most famously mounted by Nato from the air. But the guns of the Anglo-French Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) also unleashed vast quantities of ordnance against the Serbs. The RRF was engaged way beyond its mandate, which was, strictly, to fire only in defence of UN personnel when endangered.

Back in Paris, Gen Morillon had lost patience. He had long argued for a Rapid Reaction Force and, once deployed, it was put under his command. And it was Gen Morillon who made sure the force's rules of engagement were broken.

These were days during which Nato effectively sacked the UN leadership in Zagreb, overriding the UN's plea that air strikes cease. It looked from the outside like a spectacular intervention from the sidelines, but Gen Morillon had already brought Nato in, long ago, by the back door.

He came to believe 'so long as Washington was not involved in a common action, there could be no solution'

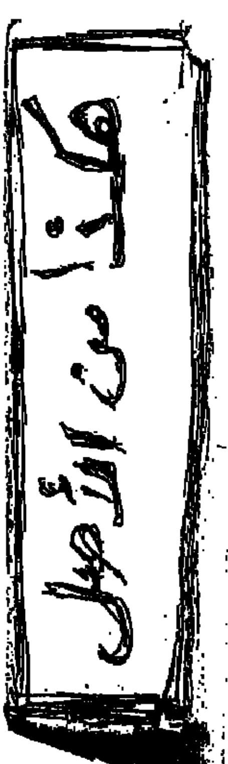
While he was commander in Sarajevo, Gen Morillon recalls, "Nato was anxious to become more directly involved." The US admiral Jim Border was at that time the commander of Nato South, in Naples; he was also Gen Morillon's close friend and ally in terms of what he thought needed to be done in Bosnia.

"We were in regular contact," says Gen Morillon, "entirely unofficially — I was getting a lot of help from Border in Naples. We established an axis of unofficial links between our staff. He was also providing me with US marines. He was providing me with intelligence, but it was absolutely unofficial — it was simply a direct line between Philippe Morillon and Jim Border . . . but with the help of the whole Nato alliance."

Gen Morillon came to believe that "so long as Washington was not involved in a common action, there could be no solution. It should have been possible to do this as the UN and as Europe. But in the end, I share the US position — with the exception that I did not agree that the need for us to act powerfully against the Serbs automatically meant support for [Bosnian president Alija] Izetbegovic or [Croatian president Franjo] Tudjman."

Since leaving Sarajevo, Gen Morillon has crossed the Atlantic 10 times to lobby the Pentagon, Vice-President Al Gore, the Senate majority leader, Bob Dole, and a host of others in favour of a resolute line. His main ally, pivotal to winning over the Clinton administration, was the navy's new chief of staff, Admiral Jim Border.

Gen Morillon has moved to Brittany, with a *pied-à-terre* in Versailles. He is about to start work on two books: one with the splendidly Bonapartian title Letter To Young Officers, a military credo, and another about one of "those very few things in life that hit you here [he points to his heart] and that you will never forget" — the story of Srebrenica.



German woes hit single currency timetable

John Palmer in Brussels, Mark Milner and David Gow

SLACKENED growth has made it doubtful whether even core monetary union countries such as Germany and France can meet all the Maastricht treaty conditions for the single currency by the end of next year.

Brussels and European Union governments are now looking for ways to relax interpretations of the treaty conditions, fearing that otherwise the European slowdown will force a delay in the timetable for a single currency beyond January 1999.

News last week that the German budget deficit in 1995 reached 3.6 per cent — well above the 3 per cent limit set by the treaty — came as a shock to the European Commission and EU governments.

The knock-on effect of slower growth in Germany could add to unemployment in France and, as a result, push up the deficit well above 4 per cent next year.

A protracted slowdown would also make it even more difficult for Germany and other countries to reduce government debt below the 60 per cent of gross domestic product ceiling set by the treaty.

Countries that fall short of the 3 per cent budget deficit limit at the end of 1997 might still qualify for the single currency if their "planned" deficit for subsequent years reached 3 per cent.

Governments that have been on the receiving end of acerbic German criticism for failure to meet the Maastricht criteria can now take comfort from Bonn's embarrassment.

"Perhaps we will hear fewer pious sermons from [the German finance minister Theo] Waigel in future," one diplomat said.

But the fact that Germany now faces similar problems to other EU countries may make it easier to agree on a less dogmatic interpretation of the Maastricht criteria.

The commission moved swiftly to deny that any delay in the EMU timetable was being considered.

Even in the darkest hours, supporters of European monetary union have always been able to draw comfort from one, seemingly immutable, fact: whenever it happened, Germany, linchpin of the whole affair, would be ready.

Now that comfortable assumption is being challenged, leaving Luxembourg the only remaining racing certainty.

Some analysts pin the blame on last spring's wage settlement, when the going rate came in at 4-5 per cent. Coupled with the strength of the German mark and perennial complaints about the inflexibility of the labour market, the wage round made at least some German companies think twice about domestic investment plans. Partly as a result, Germany is going through a mini-recession, with growth slowing to zero over the second half of last year and little to hope for in the first three months of this year.

Slower growth has meant lower tax revenues for the government but higher unemployment — up 231,000 last month to 3.8 million, or 9.9 per cent of the work force — has meant a greater drain on the public purse, with the inevitable impact on the budget deficit.

Some economists believe that while Germany's budget deficit will still be above the Maastricht level this year, a combination of higher economic growth and tax increases (possibly on fuel) will see the government on the right track in 1997.

Others are not so sure. The old certainties have gone. According to Hermann Remsperger, an analyst at BHF bank in Frankfurt: "It is an open question whether Germany will reach the [deficit] criteria. It is not a foregone conclusion."

The decision as to which countries will be ready to sign up for monetary union will be taken in the spring of 1998 and German membership is certain to become a key issue in the federal elections that year.

German politicians will have a hard job selling the idea of giving up the German mark for a single currency. It will be even harder if Germany does not meet the criteria.

Still, there will be some to whom doubts about EMU will come as a relief. Concern about the introduction of a single currency has promoted the Swiss franc into the role of Europe's strongest currency — not least because it will play no part in EMU.

Its international value soared to a record level last year, hitting Swiss exporters. Delay to currency union may cast a pall over Paris and Bonn, but it will play well enough in Zurich.

The spectre of recession and political crisis is not good for Helmut Kohl's coalition government, with its parliamentary majority of 10. Three state elections in March could sound the death-knell for the Liberal FDP, Dr Kohl's junior partners, already on the verge of extinction, and force an early general election.

The Kohl government's prospects have been worsened by the rapid economic deterioration.

Everyone agrees that by the end of the winter unemployment will have passed the 4-million mark as the combined impact of a mid-cycle downturn and structural problems takes its toll.

A desperate chancellor has made measures to alleviate joblessness the central topic of the latest roundtable talks with state premiers, the Bundesbank and both sides of industry in Bonn.

A key proposal, enthusiastically endorsed by Dr Kohl himself, is the "Alliance for Jobs", first put forward in November by Klaus Zwickel, head of IG Metall, Europe's biggest union, and thrashed out during five hours of talks with engineering industry leaders.

But the scope for reaching a corporatist German consensus, traditional escape-route out of a crisis, is slim: industry now needs at least some UK-style deregulation ("flexibility") to survive in the global economy while the unions remain wedded to 1970s interventionism. Even Dr Kohl will find it hard to fudge his way out of this conflict.

Over the top

A key Maastricht condition limits government deficits to 3% of GDP

Projected 1995 deficits as a % of GDP

3% limit

● provisional German government estimate

Country	Deficit
Germany	3.6●
France	5.0
UK	5.0
Italy	7.4
Spain	6.0
Sweden	7.3
Austria	5.6
Holland	3.1

Source: OECD

In Brief

THE world's leading aircraft makers are being asked to compete for a $1 billion order to replace British Airways's ageing fleet of short-haul aircraft.

BRITISH Petroleum is to write off $1.075 billion by closing up to 30 per cent of its worldwide crude oil processing capacity.

THE London Stock Exchange attempted to restore its damaged reputation — further battered by this month's sacking of its chief executive, Michael Lawrence — by giving the City one month to decide whether to back the introduction of order-driven share trading.

FALLING exports to Europe helped push the UK's trade deficit to its worst level for almost three years. The Central Statistical Office said the shortfall in October was $2.56 billion, up $1.1 billion from September and the highest gap since 1992.

MORE than 3 million members of the Woolwich will get $4.6 billion in shares when the UK building society abandons its mutual status and becomes a bank in 1997. The Alliance & Leicester is expected to be the next society to convert.

FOREIGN carmakers had a record year in Japan with sales rising 30 per cent. German and US makers took the lion's share of the 388,162 sales. But, in the US, Rolls-Royce increased sales by 25 per cent.

THE row over boardroom greed in the privatised utilities erupted again after the National Grid unveiled a share option scheme from which four top directors stand to make $2.26 million.

LABOUR called on the UK government to halt its controversial nuclear privatisation plans following confirmation that the sell-off will cost taxpayers $1.5 billion over the next three years.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates January 8	Sterling rates January 15
Australia	2.0752-2.0794	2.0788-2.0830
Austria	15.69-15.71	15.70-15.75
Belgium	45.85-45.95	45.96-46.06
Canada	2.1076-2.1106	2.1066-2.1096
Denmark	8.62-8.64	8.64-8.66
France	7.64-7.66	7.65-7.67
Germany	2.2316-2.2347	2.2361-2.2392
Hong Kong	11.98-11.99	11.95-11.96
Ireland	0.9675-0.9700	0.9651-0.9676
Italy	2,442-2,446	2,436-2,440
Japan	163.31-163.58	162.51-162.78
Netherlands	2.4992-2.5024	2.5051-2.5083
New Zealand	2.3497-2.3536	2.3341-2.3373
Norway	9.83-9.85	9.80-9.82
Portugal	231.50-232.13	231.59-232.21
Spain	187.62-187.90	186.39-186.67
Sweden	10.26-10.28	10.19-10.21
Switzerland	1.8025-1.8053	1.8015-1.8043
USA	1.5502-1.5512	1.5458-1.5468
ECU	1.2045-1.2059	1.2083-1.2092

FTSE100 Share Index up 66.5 at 3720.6. FTSE 250 Index up 143.2 at 4080.1. Gold up $6.50 at $396.60

Europe divided by a banana split

Julie Wolf in Brussels

A LONG-RUNNING row over bananas is rapidly becoming a major problem for the European Union.

French prime minister Alain Juppé has written to European Commission President Jacques Santer calling for tighter restrictions on EU imports of Latin American bananas to protect producers in the French Antilles islands and former European colonies in Africa and the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, the EU is coming under increasing pressure from the United States to relax import curbs on bananas from Latin America.

Although commission officials had yet to see the Juppé letter, they said France is clearly staking out its position ahead of talks among EU farm ministers in the next few months over the future of the banana rules.

Trade in bananas splits the EU straight down the middle, pitting those seeking to protect European and Caribbean producers, led by France and the UK, against a German-led bloc of open-marketeers. The German case is bolstered by outside pressure from the US, which charges that the EU is hurting American multinationals that produce Latin American bananas, most notably Chiquita.

The depth of feeling about the banana import regime among most EU governments and some of their citizens is impossible to underestimate. Hardly a week goes by without an article in the German press criticising the banana rules, which to many Germans have come to symbolise the excesses of bureaucrats in Brussels.

"The most acrimonious Council [of Ministers] meeting I've ever seen was in February 1993 when the ministers agreed on the banana regime," said one seasoned commission official. "They were roaring and shouting at each other."

Until July 1993, there was no free trade of bananas within the EU. France, Britain, Spain, Greece, Portugal, and to a lesser degree Italy, applied restrictions on so-called dollar bananas from Latin America. Other EU countries, including Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands bought dollar bananas, which cost less and are bigger than the fruit produced in Europe, Africa and the Caribbean.

However, the creation of the EU's single market forced European countries to look for a compromise. The result was a tariff quota, which provided for the EU to import 2 million tonnes of Latin American bananas at a tariff of 100 European currency units ($120) a tonne. Imports from African, Caribbean and Pacific nations were allowed into the EU duty free.

Equally controversial was the complex system set up for the allocation of import licences. This gave European trading companies which traditionally had imported bananas from ACP nations a sizable share of the licences for Latin American bananas as well. Opponents of the regime argue that it is too bureaucratic and has unfairly favoured European firms such as Fyffes over American multinationals and their subsidiaries in Europe.

Germany, which with the Benelux countries had voted against the banana arrangement, has been unsuccessful in having the regime overturned by the European Court of Justice. Latin American countries, however, got the regime condemned as discriminatory under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. This led the EU to reach a "framework agreement" with Costa Rica, Colombia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, reducing the tariff and increasing the quota for bananas from these countries. The overall quota has also since been raised to cope with growth in demand and now stands at 2.2 million tonnes.

EU member states are currently enmeshed in disputes about whether to raise the quota further to reflect the addition of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the union as well as proposed changes in the licensing system. Germany and its allies won't agree to anything that doesn't represent a major overhaul of the system.

Because all three new member states side with Germany, almost half of the EU's 15 countries now oppose the banana regime and neither side can get a qualified majority for any proposal.

Franz Fischler, agriculture commissioner, wanted to revamp the system to make it more palatable to the US, Germany and Latin American countries. But he appears to have given up on this for the moment, and last October released a report defending the banana rules.

Commission officials insist US companies have not been hurt by the system, arguing that Chiquita's difficulties were due to its own strategic and management errors.

The officials said Chiquita is now suffering because it sold bananas at unprofitably low prices to gain market share before the single market was created.

Chiquita denies this: "We did not dump bananas on the European market."

The Washington Post

Hussein Renews His Embrace With West

After siding with Iraq in the Gulf War, Jordan's king now wants Saddam Hussein overthrown. **John Lancaster** reports from Amman

FIRST he was a friend, then he was an outcast, and now King Hussein of Jordan is once again a favorite of the West. He has embraced peace with Israel, moved to reconcile with Saudi Arabia and, more recently, joined a campaign to overthrow President Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

The rewards have not been slow in coming. Last week, U.S. Defense Secretary William J. Perry traveled to Amman with an offer to sell Jordan $300 million in military hardware — including 16 F-16 warplanes — in a tangible sign of forgiveness for the king's failure to support the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. A few days later, the Saudi foreign minister showed up, demonstrating that Hussein's ultra-rich neighbors — once a source of financial support — also are ready to start making up.

But Hussein's diplomatic overtures, which have included a bold and as yet unrealized move to convene a conference of Iraqi opposition leaders in Amman, are playing much better in the West than they are at home. After giving tepid support to Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with Israel, many Jordanians have soured on the king's efforts to promote closer relations with the Jewish state next door. They say he is asking too much of them, too soon.

The king's proposals on Iraq, moreover, have angered ordinary Jordanians, many of whom still have a soft spot for Saddam, as well as business leaders fearful that Jordanian interference in Iraqi politics will jeopardize relations with the country's paramount trading partner.

"On the Iraqi thing, no one can understand him," said Fahed Fanek, an independent economist and a columnist for al-Rai, Jordan's largest daily newspaper.

"Everyone in the country is puzzled," he said. "First of all, we have no habit of interference with our neighbors — we have always suffered from interference — and second, the Iraqis have the capability to destabilize Jordan within 24 hours. He is playing with fire."

Iraq has thus far avoided confrontation with its smaller neighbor, the only legal outlet for its oil since the United Nations imposed strict trade sanctions in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Last week, however, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed Sahhaf indicated that Iraq's patience may be wearing thin, describing criticism by his Jordanian counterpart, Abdul-Karim Kabariti, as "interference in the internal affairs of Iraq."

Hussein, 60, is nothing if not a survivor. His 43 years on the throne have been marked by coup plots, assassination attempts and a civil war with Palestinian guerrilla groups that used to be headquartered here. His willingness to take unpopular public positions may only reflect the self-confidence of a royal leader who retains a strong core of support.

It also serves an important foreign policy goal — namely, patching up relations with the West and moderate Arab states, which nose-dived when Hussein refused to join in the invective against Saddam in the aftermath of Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. While Hussein did not support the invasion, he also did not condemn it, calling instead for a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Notwithstanding Jordan's close political, personal and economic ties with Iraq, Hussein's stand seemed baffling given his long history as a pro-Western bulwark against Arab extremism. None was so outraged as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, both close U.S. allies whose relations with Jordan remain chilly to this day.

But at least so far as the West is concerned, Hussein went a long way toward rehabilitating himself in 1994, when he ignored the wishes of neighboring Arab countries such as Syria and wrapped up a peace treaty with Israel. Since then, he has gone further than any other Arab leader in embracing the one-time pariah state, to the point of serving kosher food to visiting Israeli legislators during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, according to Mustafa Hamarneh, director of the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan.

"I'm surprised sometimes at how daring he is," Hamarneh said. "I think he's frustrated because people are not coming along with him. There's a gap between the king and his brother [Crown Prince Hassan] and the rest of the populace."

At least as controversial among Jordanians is the king's change of heart toward Iraq, which, it is said, stems from his disgust over Saddam's refusal to fully reveal Iraq's weapons programs in compliance with U.N. resolutions and his alarm over deteriorating living conditions in the country.

Following the August defection of several of Saddam's top aides — including his son-in-law, Hussein Kamel Hassan Majeed — the king concluded that the Iraqi regime was in danger of collapse, with dire consequences for the entire region. He has since called for reconciliation among Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish opposition groups and floated the idea of an Iraqi "federation" as a solution to ethnic divisions.

Friends . . . Israel's prime minister Shimon Peres (left) greets King Hussein in Tel Aviv PHOTO: AVI CHAYAON

Ex-S. Korean President's Slush Billion

Mary Jordan in Tokyo

SOUTH KOREAN prosecutors charged last week that a secret slush fund amassed by former President Chun Doo Hwan was much larger than previously imagined, possibly topping $1.2 billion. The fund was outlined in an indictment filed against Chun, who was accused of calling off tax audits and handling out government favors to business leaders in exchange for bribes and questionable "donations."

The charges came as Chun lay in hospital, under arrest on charges that he led a military mutiny in 1979 that led to his assumption of power. The former army general ruled South Korea in a near dictatorship from 1980 to 1988 and is recovering from a hunger strike he waged to protest his arrest.

Prosecutors detailed a secret slush fund on a scale few could have imagined before Chun's arrest last month. Chun's successor, Roh Tae Woo, has been jailed on similar bribery charges, but Chun's slush fund could be twice the size of Roh's.

The indictment charges Chun with accepting about $280 million in bribes from 42 business leaders. However, Chief Prosecutor Lee Chong Chan said Chun has admitted collecting about $900 million in illegal funds and said the real figure could top $1.2 billion. Chun ordered a family member to destroy his secret accounting book just before he was arrested, the prosecutor said.

The investigation has been difficult because "the documents are so bulky and so many years have passed since Chun was in power," Lee said. But he vowed to continue and said he would "concentrate on unveiling the source of the funds, the uses of the funds and how much money Chun still has left."

More than 160 business leaders have been interrogated about the slush fund. Lee said one business leader short on cash paid Chun with a promissory note. Others were asked to give "donations" for rural development and non-profit projects.

Heads of major companies such as Hyundai and Samsung are alleged to have given more than $25 million each to Chun's private fund. Prosecutors did not indict any business leaders last week, saying the statute of limitations for their crimes had expired. The leaders of many of South Korea's biggest conglomerates already are on trial for donating to Roh's slush fund.

As prosecutors in Seoul released details of how Chun could have socked away such vast sums another team of prosecutors was working on a separate investigation that could lead to yet more charges against Chun.

In the months after Chun led his military coup in December 1979, protests against martial law grew, culminating in a massive demonstration in Kwangju. In a confrontation with protesters in May 1980, soldiers opened fire in one of the most notorious events of modern South Korean history. The official death toll is around 200, but there have been reports that the actual number is much higher.

Hamas Splinters on Eve of Palestine Vote

Barton Gellman in Jabaliya, Gaza Strip

UNTIL a couple of weeks ago, Emad Falouji was by any measure a leading figure in Hamas. He represented the group at public events, edited its official newspaper and, it is believed, participated in Hamas decision-making.

Today Falouji is disdained as a turncoat, his newspaper closed and his expulsion from the Islamic Resistance Movement — Hamas's full name — declared.

The reason is visible in the streets of this north Gaza neighborhood. Large color posters proclaim Falouji's candidacy for the Palestinian legislative council to be elected on Saturday to govern the Gaza Strip and areas of the West Bank where Palestinian self-rule has been established. Falouji is running even though Hamas decided not to.

The new council would not exist but for an agreement negotiated between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and that is still anathema to Hamas.

Yet the Islamic movement, whose charter calls for war to wrest "every inch of Palestine" from the Jewish state, vacillated for months on whether to sponsor candidates and suspend the suicide bombings that have killed dozens of Israelis since the self-rule accord was signed.

When Hamas hard-liners, most of them abroad, finally vetoed a draft deal with PLO leader Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, Falouji and a handful of other local Muslim militants rebelled.

The splintering of the movement reflects the dilemma that the first popular ballot in Palestinian history presents for Hamas.

"Everyone knows most of our people agree to these elections," Falouji said, with two armed guards nearby, in his campaign headquarters. "The Islamic opposition must have some power, and that means it must have some members inside the new council."

Hamas is not in the election, but neither is it completely out. Not only do Falouji and a few like-minded apostates account for a handful of the nearly 700 candidates for 88 legislative seats, but the Hamas mainstream promised Arafat not to boycott or disrupt the balloting and to recognise the resulting council as the legitimate lawmaking body.

Had Hamas run, evidence suggests it would have fared badly. Its 10 percent support would translate into even fewer seats because of complex electoral math.

Hamas was strong competition for Arafat's PLO in the years when respect was earned in the street by acts of zealous struggle against Israel. But the landscape of Palestinian politics has changed, and Arafat has come out firmly on top.

Arafat's new resilience was clear as he rode out the assassination, nearly under his nose, of a Hamas bomb-builder long wanted by Israel.

The death by booby-trapped telephone of Yehiya Ayash, assumed by nearly everyone to be Israel's work, could have been a major embarrassment for Arafat just 15 days before the vote. But he merely issued a mild denunciation and instructed his forces to tell Hamas the funeral rally had better not blame him. It did not.

A similar assassination in November 1994 severely tested Arafat's grip on power. In the intervening 14 months the peace deal with Israel has begun to bear fruit. Since September, Arafat has paraded triumphantly through West Bank cities from which Israel withdrew after 28 years of occupation.

A security crackdown, brutal at times, has given Arafat's police control over what Hamas clerics say.

Battle for Everglades' Future

William Booth in Miami

NATHANIEL REED knew his environmental coalition's campaign against the Florida sugar industry, long blamed for fouling the Everglades, was making some headway when friends of the industry launched some ads comparing him to Fidel Castro.

That was, however, after Reed and his cohorts blamed the sugar industry for not only despoiling the Everglades with their fertilizer-rich runoff (mostly true), but causing the flooding in and ruination of South Florida's sprawling suburbs (mostly untrue).

But in the seemingly never-ending war over the restoration of the Everglades, the largest and most costly ecological repair effort ever proposed, the current battle is worth potentially hundreds of millions of dollars to the victors.

The environmentalists and their allies are pushing Congress to add an amendment to the current omnibus farm bill that would tax Florida growers two pennies per pound of sugar produced in the state.

It is uncertain whether the special tax amendment will have enough votes in Congress, but it might not matter. The environmentalists are considering going directly to Florida voters and asking them to endorse a similar state tax.

This may be the first time the two opponents are equally well-armed with cash — and prepared to stretch credibility in emotional appeals and in polling. "We're now in the same league as sugar has been for the last 30 years," said Reed, a real-estate developer and environmentalist, alluding to the fact his group is now bankrolled by a wealthy New York commodities trader.

"One thing I can promise you," Reed said, "We're not going away." And they seem to have the money to back up the threat. As one sugar man recently lamented: "We're being outspent."

The revenues from the proposed sugar tax — an estimated $350 million over five years — would be used to purchase about 150,000 acres of sugar land and take it out of production, using the acreage instead as marshes to store fresh water and filter farm runoff.

The sugar growers claim the tax would ruin them and put thousands of people out of work. The farmers call their opponents "radical environmental extremists," as well as liars.

The environmentalists say they are just playing hardball. But when asked specifically about a few of the more sensational ads, such as one showing flooded homes and a "dry" sugar field that wasn't actually dry, Reed demurred, saying his role in the newly formed Committee to Ensure Florida's Economic and Environmental Growth was to provide vision. "I'm not an expert on advertisement," he said.

Environmentalists in Florida hate the fact that not only do the sugar farms pollute the Everglades (as do urban and suburban dwellers), but that the farmers are encouraged by federal policies.

The proposed tax comes after environmentalists and their free-trader allies in Congress, many of them newly elected Republicans, failed to end the federal government's sugar price-support system, which keeps U.S. prices high by regulating the amount of cheaper sugar that can be imported from overseas.

Environmentalists charge that the sugar industry bought the votes that retained their price supports with millions of dollars of political donations over the last few years to Democrats and Republicans. Florida Sens. Connie Mack, R, and Bob Graham, D, both back price supports and oppose the special tax.

Anti-sugar lobbyists working for soda and candy manufacturers also have been magnanimous in their contributions to both parties.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) estimates the price supports cost "users" $1.4 billion a year, a user being either a consumer or a large candy or soda-pop manufacturer, which presumably passes on its higher costs to candy and soda consumers.

Of the estimated $536 million that goes to sugar growers, much funnels into Florida, the leading state for cane. And most of it goes to just a handful of growers. Indeed, the 33 biggest growers in the country get more than one-third of the benefits, according to the GAO.

Yet when the sugar industry shows a picture of an endangered farmer in its ads, it shows a small-time black grower sitting on the back of his pickup truck.

The sugar industry argues it needs the supports to survive against unfair and subsidized foreign competition. Moreover, the growers contend, the settlement last year of a massive federal lawsuit stipulates that the sugar growers will have to pay as much as $323 million over the next 20 years for Everglades restoration.

Robert Buker, vice president of U.S. Sugar, another major Florida company, has tirelessly argued that the sugar industry is paying its proper share in a deal struck between the industry and Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles, D, and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

The restoration of the Everglades has been estimated by federal and state officials to cost about $700 million. But many experts believe it could cost at least $1 billion, making it by far the most expensive ecological repair job in the world.

"We're paying our fair share," Flo-Sun's Dominicis said.

Not so, the environmentalists have responded. They are focusing their efforts less on the beleaguered Everglades and more on who pays more for the cleanup — the sugar growers or taxpayers. Indeed, there is the concern that support for a massive cleanup may wither if the public is asked to pay.

WILL A special sugar tax fly? After months of running multimillion dollar TV and newspaper ads attacking each other's patriotism, motives, and honesty — to say nothing about the facts, grossly twisted by both sides — the combatants are now offering dueling polls on the public's opinion about a special sugar tax.

The environmental coalition, in its ads, says Floridians support a new tax 4 to 1, according to their polling. The question, however, was phrased like this: "A major source of pollution in the Everglades is the production of sugar cane. It has been proposed that Congress assess Florida sugar growers a two-cents per pound fee that would be used to clean up the Everglades.... Agree or disagree?"

The Alliance for Sugar Growers, an industry group, countered with its own survey, asking: "From what you've seen, read or heard, do you favor or oppose a two-cents per pound tax on sugar growers?" Some 45 percent said they liked the tax; another 43 percent said they did not.

It's Business As Usual for Jailed Cali Drug Barons

Douglas Farah in San Salvador

U.S. AND Colombian law enforcement officials say drug barons jailed in Colombia in a much-heralded crackdown on narcotics trafficking have continued to conduct business, using cell phones smuggled into prison by female visitors while corrupt guards look the other way.

Corruption of the prison system and traffickers' ability to continue operations were an irritant in deteriorating relations between the United States and Colombia even before last week's stunning escape of one of the Cali cartel's top leaders from what was supposed to be a maximum-security jail, they said.

The escape of Jose Santacruz Londono from the La Picota prison marked another embarrassment to President Ernesto Samper, who already is fighting allegations that his presidential campaign received $6 million from the Cali cartel. The escape, which could only have happened with the connivance of prison officials, seemed likely to further stain the image of the government.

Colombian police, with the help of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and CIA, captured six of the top seven leaders of the Cali cartel between June and August 1995, including Santacruz on July 4, to loud applause from the Clinton administration. But senior administration officials, including DEA Director Thomas Constantine, have publicly warned Colombian officials since then that just catching leading drug traffickers is not enough.

"Corruption has triumphed. . . ," said the nation's crusading anti-drug prosecutor Alfonso Valdivieso, in a press conference after Santacruz's escape was reported by news agencies. "The capacity of the government to assure society that these people would pay for their crimes has failed."

In an interview in Bogota three days before the escape, Valdivieso warned that "corruption in the prisons is a very real problem. And corruption is impeding the investigations into many aspects of what is going on in the prisons."

Colombian and U.S. officials said the two top leaders of the Cali organization, brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela, as well as lesser traffickers who are all being held in La Picota, routinely have cellular telephones smuggled into them.

"What we have there is complete corruption," said one Colombian who has been pushing for a crackdown on the drug barons' prison conditions for several months. "Their visits are almost unrestricted. They give orders. Telephones are taken and changed regularly by visiting female guests. It is not as ostentatious as Pablo Escobar, but the effect is the same."

Escobar, leader of the Medellin cocaine cartel, negotiated his surrender to the government in 1991, after being allowed to build his own prison, complete with a soccer pitch, Jacuzzis, 60-inch television sets and banquets at which prison guards served as waiters. When officials tried to move against the prison, Escobar walked out through a secret tunnel. He was killed on December 2, 1993.

The Santacruz escape comes shortly after credible reports of splits within the Cali cartel leadership over what strategy to pursue. Miguel Rodriguez and others favor limited cooperation with the government in hopes of light sentences. Gilberto Rodriguez and his supporters prefer trying to intimidate or buy the government, and especially the Congress, in the hope that they can clear their names without having to confess to anything.

Santacruz's escape is not the only embarrassment faced by the government over its prisons.

The most alarming occurred in August when Ivan Urdinola, a notorious trafficker, was found by police to not only have stocked a personal kitchen with lobster, whiskey and caviar, but also to have built a sophisticated telecommunications system.

Urdinola, described as the "worst and bloodiest" of the drug traffickers in prison, created a communications center by buying up houses just outside the prison walls. With a walkie-talkie, authorities said, he gave instructions and received information from his henchmen manning the center, which had cellular phones, faxes and beepers.

Nation Caught Between Hope and Despair

OPINION
Jim Hoagland

HAS America ever sent out a more mixed message about this nation's spirit and strength than it did in the opening days of 1996?

Two incompatible images dominate the American scene, competing to define U.S. interests and intentions at home and abroad. The confusion they create cannot endure.

The first image is the near hubristic American ethos that has reshaped and guided the world for the past half-century: the upbeat, can-do, only in America spirit displayed by the American troops who hurled a line of steel across the raging Sava River and moved into Bosnia to oversee a fragile peace.

The competing spirit is the can't-doism that has locked Congress and the White House in a budget war that is more about power and mission than money. The politicians on the Potomac took the optimistic altruism of the GIs on the Sava and stood it on its head. The cynicism and selfishness some lawmakers displayed — a paycheck-drawing Phil Gramm wondering if anybody misses government yet comes to mind — would do any Balkan warlord proud.

This contrast between military can-doism and political paralysis is not fully explained by the differing worlds of soldiers, who necessarily deal with the concrete and quantifiable, and of politicians, who devote themselves to the abstractions of causes and rhetoric.

Two visions of America are at war with each other on a battlefield of ideas that spans the globe. Gramm would shut down federal operations along the Potomac and along the Sava. He and others on the isolationistic far right (and on the isolationistic far left) understand that an America that is optimistic and altruistic abroad is more likely to be that way at home as well.

It is not coincidental that America's greatest involvement in world affairs and its greatest expansion of governmental responsibility for its own disadvantaged or temporarily displaced citizens have occurred over the past six decades. Depression, followed by economic growth in war and peacetime, made a series of government safety nets first necessary, then possible at home. Buoyed by its own success, America did become the world's shining city on a hill. For most of this century, one country did set a standard of international generosity and responsibility that others aspired to, mocked or sought to thwart, but could not ignore.

Vietnam taught Americans to distrust abstraction and rhetoric — and their own historical optimism — when lives are at stake. In Indochina, Chile, Greece and elsewhere American policy and presence abroad were seen on the left as inherently evil. Those perceptions sparked the McGovernite "Come Home America" movement, which today in its new version is headed by Gramm, Pat Buchanan and other conservative ideologues, who see the world infecting America as clearly as Abbie Hoffman once saw America infecting the world.

The line that runs from the Sava to the Potomac is also visible in the conciliatory approach on both the Bosnian operation and the federal shutdown by Bob Dole — the only presidential contender who is a combat veteran. He was willing to compromise on sending ground troops to Bosnia and on sending federal employees back to work rather than drive over the ideological cliff of doubt and pessimism with Gramm, Buchanan and the Republican House freshmen.

President Clinton's belated activism on both the domestic agenda and Bosnia stems far more from political calculation than optimism. Even so, that activism is consistent with the creative force America has put into building the international ethos of the past half century, and with the open pride and accomplishment those young tank drivers and bridge builders showed moving into Bosnia.

It is the very presence of these young American men and women in the Balkans, more than their firepower, that is likely to change history for the better. I try to imagine what the Serbs, Croats and Bosnians who saw these young giants descend from stormy skies to perform logistical miracles in the mud thought about the nation that sent them.

These Americans are suitably wary of what they are being asked to do because of Vietnam. But theirs is the opportunity of a lifetime — to show the rest of the world and their fellow citizens America being all that it can be. It is the Sava's message of hope, rather than the Potomac's current slough of despond, that must prevail.

Russia Near to Selling Enriched Uranium

U.S. protests against the sale of bomb-grade nuclear material appear to be of no avail, reports **Thomas W. Lippman**

RUSSIA is nearing agreement to sell substantial amounts of weapons-grade enriched uranium to operators of nuclear-research reactors in Europe, a transaction that would put Moscow at odds with longstanding U.S. nuclear non-proliferation objectives.

The United States has protested to no avail to Russia and to Euratom, the nuclear agency of the European Community, according to State Department officials, who confirmed reports in the nuclear-industry trade press that a deal appears imminent.

"I'm not optimistic they are going to follow our advice on this," said Fred McGoldrick, deputy director of State's Office of Nuclear Energy Affairs.

He and other officials, as well as anti-proliferation watchdogs outside the government, said they fear the planned transaction would undermine U.S. policy in two important ways:

It would promote a commercial market for nuclear explosive material and would eliminate incentives for Europeans to convert their reactors to run on some other, less dangerous, form of nuclear fuel.

Russia has a large supply of surplus bomb-grade uranium from dismantled nuclear weapons. The country's nuclear energy minister, Viktor Mikhailov, always on the lookout for sources of hard-currency income to shore up his obsolete empire, has tended to regard the material as an exportable commodity, while Washington has for many years sought to bar commercial transactions of a material that can easily be converted into nuclear explosives.

In an effort to keep the Russian material off the commercial market, the United States has agreed to buy 500 tons of it for $12 billion and have the material "blended down," or de-enriched, for use as conventional nuclear fuel in nuclear electric power plants.

But "they have more than that, and they're in search of hard currency," McGoldrick said. Mikhailov is the same Russian official whose quest for nuclear markets led him to agree to supply nuclear power plants to Iran, over vociferous and continuing U.S. objections.

U.S. officials and nonproliferation experts say they have little fear that the academics and medical researchers who rely on the small reactors in allied European countries will turn into nuclear pirates peddling dangerous material or threatening others with it.

But the officials oppose any transactions that create or sustain a demand for weapons-usable material on the theory that the more commerce there is, the greater the risk of theft or diversion by unauthorized persons.

"One of the key elements of [President Clinton's] non-proliferation policy has been to minimize and eventually to eliminate the use of high-enriched uranium in civil world commerce," Secretary of State Warren Christopher wrote last month in urging Energy Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary to resume a stalled Energy Department program aimed at encouraging Europeans to switch to other fuels.

In its natural state, uranium contains less than 1 percent of the isotope U-235, the fissionable material used to produce the explosive chain reaction that powers commercial nuclear electricity plants as well as bombs. Uranium for power plant fuel is enriched to about 4 percent U-235.

High-enriched, weapons-grade uranium used as bomb fuel, is about 90 percent U-235. A small amount can be fashioned into a nuclear explosive with relative ease, according to experts.

Western European nations at one time had 23 small reactors, used for academic research and production of medical isotopes, that ran on high-enriched uranium (HEU). The United States for years has been encouraging them to convert to lower-enriched fuels, offering to pay for development of alternative fuels and take back the radioactive spent fuel as an incentive.

All but three of the 23 reactors have converted or their operators have promised to do so, U.S. officials said. But the conversion incentive program has been stalled for several years by legal and environmental problems — hence Christopher's letter urging O'Leary to get it untracked — and Germany has announced plans to build a new HEU-fueled reactor at the Technical University of Munich.

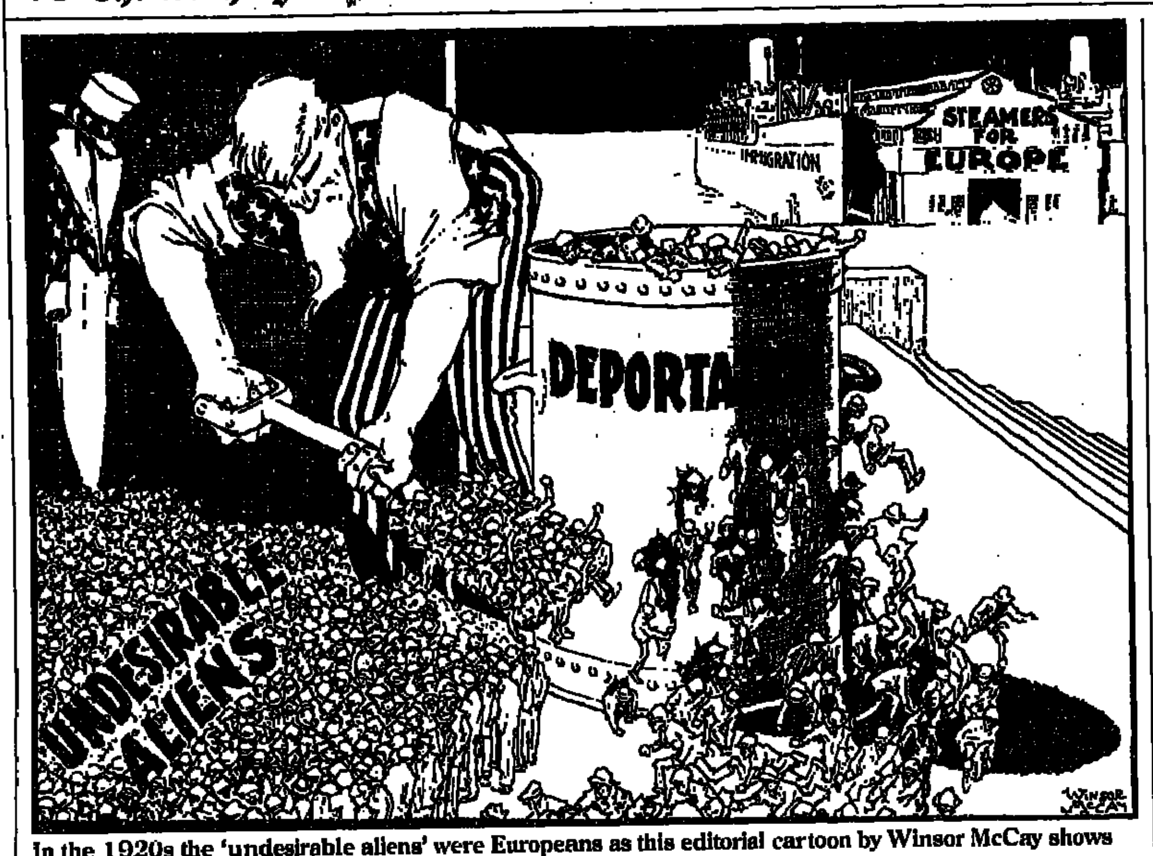
Non-proliferation activists at Greenpeace and the Washington-based Nuclear Control Institute said the planned Russian sale of HEU is especially objectionable because it assures Europeans of having enough HEU to power the new German reactor as well as the two in France and one in the Netherlands that plan to continue to use the material.

Europeans formerly obtained their nuclear fuel from the United States, which gave Washington leverage as it tried to get them to convert. But the United States no longer produces or exports HEU.

The Russian sale would "pull the rug out from under a 20-year effort to end reliance on bomb-grade uranium," said Nuclear Control Institute president Paul Leventhal. "A fresh supply going to Europe now? It doesn't make sense. It undermines the whole program."

One senior U.S. official said the planned HEU sale would be discussed later this month at a meeting between Vice President Al Gore and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who confer regularly on arms control and proliferation issues.

But Mikhailov, the nuclear-energy boss, has a reputation as an independent wheeler and dealer who does not take orders from Chernomyrdin, and Mikhailov has said repeatedly that his mission is to raise cash.



In the 1920s the 'undesirable aliens' were Europeans as this editorial cartoon by Winsor McCay shows

Still Looking for El Dorado

Mario T. Garcia

FRESH BLOOD:
The New American Immigrants
By Sanford J. Unger
Simon & Schuster. 399pp. $25

HUDDLE FEVER:
Living in the Immigrant City
By Jeanne Schinto
Knopf. 302pp. $24

AMERICAN DREAMING:
Immigrant Life on the Margins
By Sarah J. Mahler
Princeton University Press. 268pp.
$49.50; $15.95 paperback

WHY has immigration become the hot political topic that it is today? In 1994, California voters overwhelmingly endorsed Proposition 187, which would deny most public services, including education, to undocumented immigrants. Congress is now considering legislation that will cut almost by half the number of legal immigrants entering the United States. If this wasn't enough to suggest a rising hysteria about immigration, there are other efforts to promote a constitutional amendment that would deny citizenship to the children of undocumented immigrants born in the United States.

Unfortunately, we have lacked a sober, historical and rational discussion on immigration. To their credit, the three books under review here provide such discussions. In Fresh Blood, Sanford J. Ungar has written a lucid and informative treatment of the "new American immigrants." Ungar, the dean of the School of Communications at American University, traveled across the country to discover who these new immigrants are and what their impacts on American society have been.

What Ungar discovered is that immigrants' contributions to our country outweigh any possible harm they could cause. Their hopes for a better life, their aspirations for their children, their vision of the United States as a "city on a hill" translate into industrious, thrifty and productive members of society, whether they are here with proper documents or not.

Ungar observes that the new immigrants, while providing new blood to stimulate the American body, are at the same time facing opposition and even hatred. "Many of these immigrants look different, sound different, and many dress and eat differently from what we have come to regard as typically 'American'," Ungar writes.

Yet these new immigrants are not that much different from earlier ones. Ungar reminds us that all immigrants, past and present, adjust in time. They change and are changed by the process of immigrating. They become, and certainly their children do, Americans. "This is the new America," Ungar concludes, "every bit as American as apple pie and bagels and egg rolls and fajitas and gyros and pizza and sushi."

But the new immigrants also reflect important changes in our society that help explain their presence and the significant increase in immigration during the last three decades. These changes concern the "de-industrialization" of the United States and its "re-industrialization."

De-industrialization has meant that many of the large industries of the past that fueled the Industrial Revolution in the country either no longer exist or have significantly been reduced in output. Re-industrialization, on the other hand, is represented by Silicon Valley and its many clones throughout the country. These firms are high-tech and high-paying.

But re-industrialization also involves the expansion of low-tech industries in cities such as Los Angeles and New York and places in between. Smaller-sized industries are attempting to compete with Third World production by bringing the Third World to the United States in the form of cheap immigrant labor. But high-tech industries also need immigrant labor, at least indirectly. The surplus income generated by these new jobs spawns a range of service industries: restaurants, resorts and medical centers. There is a need for gardeners and, of course, household domestics.

These changes in the U.S. economy form the backdrop of Jeanne Schinto's Huddle Fever. In a highly readable personal account, Schinto describes contemporary life in the changing immigrant city of Lawrence, Massachussetts. Once the center of New England's Industrial Revolution, even earlier than other towns Lawrence underwent de-industralization. Schinto poignantly narrates the effects of Lawrence's industrial decay on the lives of earlier Irish and Italian immigrants and their descendants.

For while Lawrence has never recovered from its de-industrialization, the surrounding communities have undergone what was once referred to as the "Massachusetts Miracle." This miracle, such as it was, is high-tech. But it has also generated some low-tech businesses and, more important, service industries linked to high-tech. This means services by Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Central Americans. Some of this Latino diaspora has now settled in Lawrence, which, Schinto observes, has become "a city of old Italians and young Latinos."

It is these changes and the decline of the American middle class that are producing the ethnic tensions visible not only in Lawrence, but in many areas where "old" immigrants meet "new" immigrants. For the moment there appears on the surface to be no reconciliation between the two. Yet perhaps there is still hope in Schinto's astute observation: "Every immigrant's story is the same."

But if immigrants, on the whole, continue to enrich our country and if we can understand the larger economic changes that have produced this new wave of immigrants, what of the immigrants' lives? The new immigrants are neither the outlaws suggested by their opponents nor the folkloric vanguard of multi-culturalism suggested by some of their defenders. They are people with the complexities — good and bad — that we all possess. They come to America with high hopes and an unrealistic vision of what to expect. Hopes, in many cases, lead to frustrations and despair. This dynamic is the central focus of Sarah J. Mahler's American Dreaming, a sobering and scholarly study of, as she puts it, "immigrant life on the margins."

USING Long Island as her case study, Mahler, an anthropologist at the University of Vermont, examined the large influx of Central Americans (principally Salvadorans) and South Americans (principally Peruvians) who have been drawn to the suburban communities of Long Island due to the expansion of low-tech industries and the service sector.

The most significant and at the same time controversial finding of Mahler's research is that in the immigrant communities she studied, few opportunities for economic mobility exist. Often, the only avenue for economic gain lies in immigrants taking advantage of each other. One example of this kind of exploitation involves those who initially rent an apartment or a small house and take in boarders who wind up paying most of the rent.

None of these important texts on contemporary immigration to the United States will by itself allay the growing tensions and even hysteria over immigration. Yet they may bring enlightenment to an issue that speaks to what kind of society we will become in the 21st century.

Birth Pangs of an Emerging Nation

Ray Suarez

HEART OF WHITENESS:
Afrikaners Face Black Rule in the
New South Africa
By June Goodwin and Ben Schiff
Scribner. 416pp. $27.50

THE DAY before balloting began in South Africa's first all-race elections in April of 1994, I covered the bombing of a black bus station outside Johannesburg. Torn flesh littered the sidewalks for blocks. Shocked shop clerks began to sweep up a sea of broken glass. Before the day was out, the bombing was connected to an Afrikaner resistance group opposed to the elections and dedicated to causing as much havoc as it could before the polls opened.

"It's the last kick of a dying mule," said Dirk Coetzee, the former government death-squad leader who rocked South Africa with his revelations, repentance and, finally, his enlistment in the African National Congress. We talked about the bombers. "They are really pathetic, man," he told me and added. "They can't believe this is really happening."

The men who planted the bombs, the repentant killer, the architects of the apartheid system and the prime minister who ushered in the new South Africa are all members of the same ethnic group — the Afrikaners. Their saga has been at the heart of the South African story for the past 300 years. They have written a disproportionate amount of the history of the southern tip of Africa. Whether or not they are willing to join their country's new way of life will have a disproportionate bearing on its success.

Heart Of Whiteness might have appeared churlish and overly skeptical had it appeared at the time of Nelson Mandela's election, when the world was still busy cooing and smiling over South Africa's infant democracy. A year-and-a-half of crossed fingers later, Christian Science Monitor reporter June Goodwin and Oberlin professor Ben Schiff's book is right on time. They give us a portrait of the people who ran the South African state since 1910, made that state an Afrikaner jobs program, and turned their black countrymen into dispossessed wage slaves.

Goodwin and Schiff's interviews poke into the truths behind the Afrikaner myth: the influence of the powerful and secret Brotherhood during apartheid, the evolution of the beloved Afrikaans as a creole tongue later whitened by racist academics, and the Christian piety of a country willing to sanction almost any sin in the name of holding back the *swart gevaar*, the black peril.

As an inward-looking, white group on a black continent, the Afrikaners have always answered their critics by insisting, "You cannot understand us because you do not know our history." These authors give the reader historical information essential to understanding the Afrikaner past and give a thorough reading of the fissures in this deeply troubled clan.

What unwinds through the book is the Afrikaner predicament. Their search goes on for a new way of life, at peace with neighbors historically enslaved, exploited, or merely despised. The need for allies in a sea of enemies has forced Afrikaners to dismantle their 300-year-old story of dogged self-sufficiency. As 3 million people out of close to 40 million South Africans, Afrikaners must now choose the organizing principle that will allow them to build bridges to their fellow citizens.

Heart Of Whiteness beautifully portrays the Afrikaner allegiance to their history, language and faith. Goodwin and Schiff know exactly how much the reader needs to fill in the portraits their interview subjects sketch.

A few events are central to Afrikaner history: The Great Trek set into motion a history of resistance to authority and separation. Wars against black nations and British colonial forces hardened the nation, gave it legendary victories and defeats. The Afrikaner ascendancy after 1910 brought revenge over the haughty *Engels* — the English-speakers — and a political system assuring the Afrikaner's power and control: apartheid.

The color of their skin did not bind Afrikaners to the English. Their language and faith — Afrikaans and the Dutch Reformed Church — are now spoken and subscribed to by millions of non-whites. Though Afrikaners have shared their church and *die taal* (the language) throughout their history (Afrikaans is the mother tongue of South Africa's colored or mixed-race people), efforts to unite the Afrikaners with other South Africans around them have met with mixed results.

Goodwin and Schiff explore all this in telling detail, but what emerges at last is an appropriately ambiguous sum to their story's diverse parts. In this tapestry of Afrikaner life, funny, resilient and heroic people keep appearing. On page after page the reader is tempted first by optimism, then despair.

Heart Of Whiteness is an important addition to the growing body of work by Western scholars and journalists covering South Africa. The peculiar history and current predicament of the Afrikaners have begged for a truly nuanced telling. Goodwin and Schiff's work fills that need beautifully.

The final days in François Mitterrand's long battle against cancer were spent reflecting upon what comes after death. 'It's not dying I'm really worried about, but not living any more,' he once remarked

Preparing for life's greatest challenge

"BUT I'm not going to die!" François Mitterrand quipped when his old friend — and executor — André Rousselet visited him on January 6 and casually asked a few questions of the "in the event of" type. Mitterrand's reply was, says Rousselet, "a kind of provocation, a way of resisting death", which the former president knew was imminent (he died two days later).

Between May last year, when he handed over to President Jacques Chirac, and his death on January 8, Mitterrand spent as much time as he could with close friends and relatives, and revisited places which he had always found beautiful or had sentimental associations for him.

Last June he set off, as he had done every year since 1946, on a ritual walk up the Roche de Solutré, a rocky spur in the Morvan, in the company of old friends for whom, as for him, the rock symbolised the ordeals of the last war. But this time he could not make it to the top. "I want to go up there, but it's as though I'm trapped in a bubble. A general anaesthetic is quite a shock to the system, you know."

Also in June, Mitterrand visited Venice, a city as familiar to him as an old book. Two months later he was once again on the banks of Lac Chauvet, a high volcanic lake in the Puy-de-Dôme *département*, where he liked to eat stuffed cabbage in the company of old friends, who included a trio of gourmet Socialist deputies known as the "Auvergne musketeers" (all now dead) and former budget minister, Michel Charasse.

In September Mitterrand spent some time on the Breton island of Belle-Ile, which he had discovered only late in life. "I like everything about this place — the air, the colours, the skies. There's something inimitable here, a kind of equilibrium, a kind of strength."

Before leaving Paris on December 23 to spend Christmas in Aswan, Egypt, with his daughter Mazarine and a few close friends, he had told his doctors: "In a month I will be gone." In Aswan he remained for most of the time in his hotel suite or on its terrace, and was too weak to walk far without support.

Mitterrand spent the New Year at his country house at Latche, in southwest France, before returning to his Paris home near the Eiffel Tower on January 2. Five days later he wrote his will and asked his personal doctor, Jean-Pierre Tarot, to pass it on to his family.

In it he indicated very precisely how the funeral ceremony was to be organised. There would be a religious service at his home town of Jarnac (Charente), followed by burial in the family vault, with no speeches and no flowers except for one bunch of violet and yellow irises and another of tea roses.

During his final weeks, he had given his family and doctors instructions not to prolong his life if he showed signs of physical decline. But all his friends were struck by the sharpness of his mind right up to the end. Rousselet describes how, when Mitterrand seemed to have lost track of the conversation, he would emerge from his apparent torpor to provide those present with the *mot juste* or the name of someone no one could remember.



Anne Pingeot, François Mitterrand's mistress, comforts their daughter Mazarine at last week's funeral in Jarnac PHOTO PHILIPPE WOJAZER

Anne Lauvergeon, a former special adviser to Mitterrand and a close friend, says that when he was confined to his bed he would repeatedly ask her to read Balzac, Taine, Joyce and Aragon to him.

"I can feel death creeping up on me," he told close friends. Death was something he had often talked and written about. It caused him irritation rather than anxiety. "What annoys me," he would say, "is not knowing what comes next." Rousselet says: "He didn't see death as an abrupt change, but as an evolution — a kind of invasion, slow or quick, whose outcome was certain."

Mitterrand was fascinated by death, not because he was a "necrophiliac" (as he denied in a magazine interview of 1981), but because he believed "birth and death to be the two wings of time — how can man fulfil his quest if he is ignorant of that dimension?" he wrote in a 1978 book. "A society which hides death from the eyes of the living, covers it up like a lie and removes it from the everyday, does not glorify or preserve life, but corrupts it."

He returned to the theme in his preface to La Mort Intime, a book written last year by Marie de Hennezel, a psychologist who works in a palliative care unit.

"How should one die?" he asked. "We live in a world which dreads the question and tries to dodge it. Earlier civilisations looked death straight in the face. Never perhaps has our relationship with death been so poor as in these times of spiritual barrenness, where man, in his haste to exist, seems to sidestep the mystery. He does not realise that in so doing he robs his love of life of an essential source."

Mitterrand said that his own love of life was one of the reasons for his constant preoccupation with "the huge question mark represented by death". In a 1994 interview he said: "It's not dying I'm really worried about, but not living any more."

He did not believe dying meant disappearing. In his last New Year's message as president, on December 31, 1994, he told the French people: "I believe in the forces of the spirit, and I shall not leave you."

Referring to his conversations with Hennezel about "the profound change she observes in some people just before they die", Mitterrand wrote in his preface to her book: "At the moment of greatest loneliness, when the exhausted body is on the verge of the infinite, another form of time establishes itself outside the normal boundaries.

Sometimes in the period of only a few days, through the help of a presence that allows despair and pain to express themselves, the sick take a grip on their life, appropriate it and extract the truth from it . . . It is as if, just as everything is coming to an end, they are at last released from the welter of sorrows and illusions that prevented them from belonging to themselves.

"Death can make a person become what he was destined to be: it can, in the fullest sense of the term, be a fulfilment. Is there not a fraction of eternity in man — something which death brings into the world, and which it causes to be born elsewhere?"

(January 10)

An illness fought in the public eye

Jean-Yves Nau and Franck Nouchi

IT HAS now emerged that François Mitterrand had been suffering from cancer of the prostate since the end of 1981, in other words from the beginning of his first term in office. Towards the end of his life he began to question the wisdom of his decision to publish regular reports on his state of health throughout his two terms as president.

That decision constituted a courageous innovation in the history of the French republic. His predecessor at the Elysée, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, despite promises made at the beginning of his term, never published the results of any health checkup he had during his presidency from 1974-81.

Like other politicians of his generation, Mitterrand remembered the suffering endured by President Georges Pompidou and the tissue of organised disinformation about his true state of health that surrounded his final months. When still a presidential candidate in 1981, Mitterrand promised to issue six-monthly medical reports if he were elected.

The first report was published as soon as he became president. Signed by his personal doctor, Dr Claude Gubler, it concluded that the results of his "clinical and paraclinical checkup [were] normal".

Later that year, the magazine Paris-Match revealed that the president had undergone a series of medical examinations, including a bone scan. The Elysée talked of lumbago. Gubler, while pointing out that his professional code of ethics prevented him from saying "anything at all", let it be known that he had not envisaged the possibility that his patient might have a tumour. A medical report in December 1981 referred to bone disorders and said they were being "treated"; but it did not explain the true medical reasons that had prompted the bone scan.

Successive six-monthly medical reports by Dr Gubler, often couched in rather imprecise language, showed the president's health to be normal over the following decade. Even as late as July 1992, the official line was that "normal results" had been obtained after a "thorough" clinical, biological and paraclinical examination.

Yet only two months later Mitterrand was operated on for prostate cancer. An official statement said that the disease, which had been "detected at its initial stage", would not prevent the president from carrying out his duties.

In November 1992, Mitterrand told TV viewers: "I don't know how long ago; but perhaps a year or a year and a half ago, certain signs appeared which were referred to in the [July] communiqué and which alerted a certain number of specialists, who said to themselves: 'Wait a minute, what's going on?' So something abnormal had occurred. But it was in August that things speeded up. I was either in Paris or in the Landes, and I can tell you I suffered a great deal. I wanted to wait until the September 20 referendum [on Maastricht] had been held, but I couldn't hang on that long." This was a clear contradiction of his doctor's reference to a cancer "detected at its initial stage".

That was the first difference of opinion between Mitterrand and Dr Gubler. Subsequently there were many others, and with other doctors as well. In her book L'Année des Adieux, Laure Adler describes how Mitterrand told Dr Claude Kalfon, his personal military doctor, that he was "no good". She also says the president told her more than once that he thought he had been "badly — very badly — treated".

Mitterrand's elder brother, Robert, claimed in a television interview on January 9 that the former president "could have been saved as I was saved [from the same disease] — though I'm not accusing anyone". He said there were four or five doctors who could not agree on how to treat his brother, and who opposed foreign specialists being brought in.

THE history of Mitterrand's cancer, which can now be pieced together, shows that, contrary to his own and his brother's contention, he consistently received the best treatment available at any given time. Indeed, Mitterrand was quite happy with his doctors until 1994.

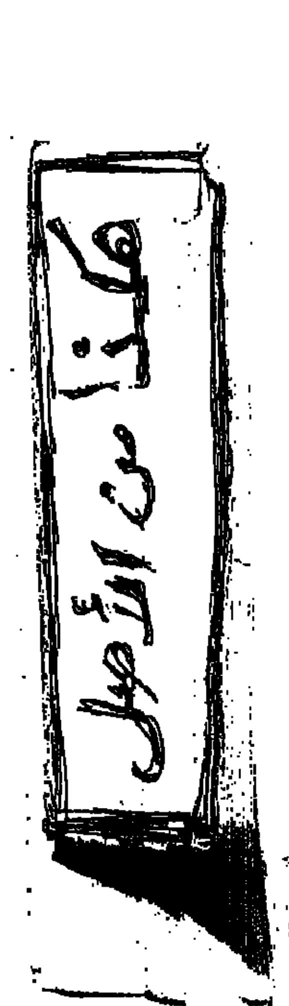
Contrary to official statements signed by Dr Gubler, then, it was at the beginning of his first term that prostate cancer was diagnosed. At that time (the end of 1981), it was at such an advanced stage that the specialists consulted preferred not to operate. They decided to give the president hormonal treatment. It very soon transpired that Mitterrand was responding well. That relatively successful containment of the disease lasted 10 years.

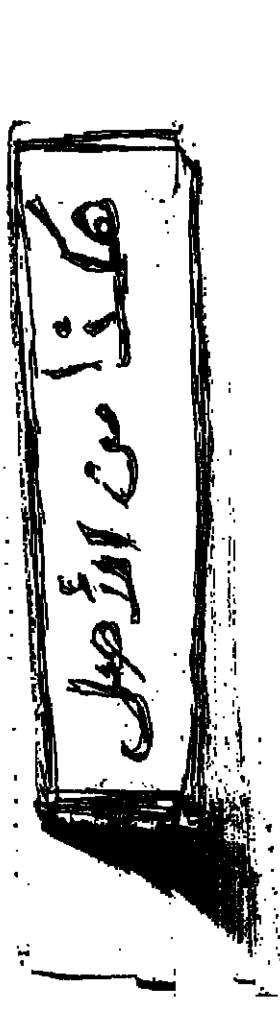
On December 31, 1994, the president dispensed with the services of Dr Gubler, and a little later with those of Dr Kalfon, preferring to consult less traditional physicians such as Philippe de Kuyper, a homoeopathic doctor. But the greatest help and comfort came from Dr Jean-Pierre Tarot, a pain specialist who had treated one of Mitterrand's friends, Jean Riboud, before he died.

During his final months, Mitterrand talked to one of his doctors about the limitations and pitfalls of the system of transparency he had wanted to introduce. He admitted that he could feel people scrutinising him more closely once knowledge of his cancer became public.

When asked whether he thought the truth should be told about the health of those who hold the highest office of state, Mitterrand replied: "It's a question that has no simple answer." He went on to say he would not object to a system, provided for by the constitution, that allowed respect for the individual's private life to be reconciled with the interests of the nation.

(January 10 and 11)





Canadians strive to pick up the pieces

The nation narrowly voted to remain united but the Québéçois feel cheated, writes **Martine Jacot**

WHEN he addressed his New Year wishes to the Canadian people, Federal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien hoped that they would take advantage of the holiday break to think about what could be done to ensure that Canada, which was regarded by the United Nations as the country with the highest standard of living in the world, would remain peaceful, prosperous and united.

Two months after the federalists' knife-edge victory in Quebec's referendum on whether the province should become independent or remain part of the federation, Canadians are doing all in their power to forget the still real risk that their country may break up.

They are particularly concerned by the slowdown in growth and by persistently high unemployment (which stands at 9 per cent of the population of working age). According to a recent opinion poll, only one Canadian out of five would be prepared to try to reach a new compromise with Quebec which would leave the French-speaking province feeling more comfortable within the federation.

Quebec itself remains traumatised and deeply divided after the the referendum, which resulted in 50.6 per cent of the electorate, in a huge turnout, voting against "sovereignty" combined with an offer of partnership with the rest of Canada.

Federalists both in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada were unanimous in accepting that, irrespective of the polarisation produced by the referendum, Québécois wanted to see far-reaching reforms in the Canadian federation.

Chrétien himself recognised that fact when, on the evening of the referendum, he promised innovatory solutions, so that Canada would never again have to go through such an "existential crisis".

But the great majority of Québécois were disappointed by the vague package of changes proposed by Chrétien in mid-December, which seemed to have been improvised at the last moment.

Without even waiting for the committee of experts charged with proposing solutions to hand in their report, Chrétien tabled a resolution in the Ottawa House of Commons which accepted that the Quebec people formed a "distinct society", defined as consisting of a majority of French-speakers, a single culture and a tradition of civil law.

Passed by 148 votes to 91, the motion could only be of symbolic value, since Québécois have been pressing since the early eighties for the recognition of their specificity to be written into the constitution so as to protect the rights (notably linguistic and cultural) that go with it.

Regarded by the separatist camp as window-dressing, the motion was strongly attacked by the Reform Party, the rightwing opposition party with a strong base in the west of the country. The party's leader, Preston Manning, is utterly opposed to Quebec gaining any special privilege likely to erode the principle of the equality of the 10 provinces.

Also of symbolic value was the second resolution adopted by the Ottawa parliament in favour of granting the right to veto constitutional change not only to Quebec but to Ontario, British Columbia and two regional structures, the Atlantic provinces and the Prairie provinces. A third motion confirmed the principle that certain federal responsibilities (such as manpower training) should be handed over to the provinces.

Both federalists and so-called "soft-nationalist" Québécois expected a more original, concrete and ambitious programme. Editorial writers lambasted Chrétien's lack of imagination and vision.



Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien promised that the nation would never again have to go through such 'an existential crisis'

It was hoped in some quarters that a process of intensive consultation on the future of the federation would be set in motion; but such exercises have already been organised in the past to no effect. Others have timidly called for the setting up of a constituent assembly.

Chrétien will have to make do as best he can with a particularly cumbersome and complicated process of constitutional amendment, which often requires unanimity on the part of provincial governments and their respective parliaments.

A wide range of options remain open, on the other hand, for Lucien Bouchard, the architect of the remarkable increase in the "yes-vote" camp during the last few weeks leading up to the referendum.

"Saint Lucien" is as popular as ever and remains the obvious candidate to succeed Jacques Parizeau, Quebec's outgoing premier, as leader of the separatist Parti Québécois.

His proclaimed priority is to fight unemployment and put the public finances of a heavily indebted province back on a sound footing. That will involve sacrifices that could well erode his popularity.

Meanwhile, Chrétien says he now spends much of his time trying to convince investors worried about the continuing uncertainty of the situation in Quebec not to pull out of the province in the hope of finding greener grass elsewhere.

(January 2)

Executions on the rise again in China

Francis Deron in Beijing

WESTERN travellers who ventured into remote parts of ancient China were often shocked to see the heads of executed criminals in little wooden cages nailed to the fronts of houses as a warning to potential criminals. It was a way of expressing the authority of the state, especially when that authority was under threat.

The last days of the Deng Xiaoping era present certain similarities with the past, minus the macabre element. There has recently been a spectacular increase in the number of criminals who are executed with a bullet in the back of the head — at their family's expense.

Statistics which Amnesty International has compiled from official Chinese news media, show that the authorities have vigorously stepped up this most radical form of crime-fighting.

With 1,313 executions and more than 500 suspended death sentences in the first half of 1995, the courts had already more than met the implicit "quota" behind the previous year's figures of 2,050 executions and some 700 suspended death sentences. The end of 1995 saw an increased use of the death penalty, whose deterrent powers have been elevated to the level of dogma by the regime.

In many cases, highlighted by the media, the offences concerned are economic crimes committed in the regions most exposed to the unbridled neocapitalism that is so characteristic of post-Maoist China.

The individuals involved tend to be corrupt officials or petty mafiosi guilty of crimes which, to an increasing extent, have been spawned by a "no-holds-barred" form of economic boom.

Amnesty International's concern seems justified, to judge from the expeditious behaviour of the courts, which make no bones about carrying out to the letter every instruction received from the Communist Party and applying the death penalty whenever they can, even for non-violent crimes.

It is not just drug traffickers, white slave traders and armed robbers who are executed. Other victims of the death penalty include motorbike thieves, swindlers, counterfeiters, "propagators of superstitions" and even people accused of "counterrevolutionary" crimes (in other words political offences).

This upping of the penal ante is a phenomenon which has recurred from time to time in China's history, and which has nothing to do with communism, but results from the strict conformism of its bureaucracy.

In times of uncertainty, it is sometimes a good idea for a provincial "mandarin" to fill the tumbrels with bodies so as to prove to the "throne" that no indulgence is possible under his jurisdiction. And the central authority is delighted to be able to make political capital out of being seen by the population as a defender of the weak and the vulnerable.

The current wave of increasingly harsh sentences suggests that the method has not worked. It is true that the attempt, a few years ago, to reduce the level of robbery on the roads by a campaign of repression based on the use of the death penalty resulted in a temporary improvement in travellers' safety. But the need to crack down yet again shows that the situation has worsened. Moreover, the new legal provisions for the death penalty can now be applied for crimes ranging from declarations of accidents aimed at defrauding insurance companies to serious cases of tax evasion.

In an article he wrote for the Asian edition of the Wall Street Journal, the American-based Chinese dissident, Liu Binyan, argued that the regime's authority has so collapsed that in some remote regions private militias have taken over from the state.

But the gravity and scale of the phenomenon should not be exaggerated. Behind a facade of apparent consensus, Mao's China went through a similarly wobbly period when the Communist Party imploded during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69; but it subsequently managed to reassert itself.

The fact remains that the current campaign to rub out criminals does little to enhance the image of social stability that the regime is so keen to project as the moment approaches when Deng Xiaoping's successor will need to be found.

(January 5)

Yeltsin prays for a Russian 'miracle'

Jean-Baptiste Naudet in Moscow

MOSCOW's Cathedral of the Holy Saviour, which was demolished by Josef Stalin, has just been rebuilt by Boris Yeltsin in the hope that it will come to symbolise Russia's spiritual and national rebirth — and help him win June's presidential elections.

For those used to the slowness of public works in Russia, the speed with which the cathedral has been rebuilt is a "miracle", to quote the words of Alexis II, "patriarch of all the Russias".

The new cathedral, whose foundation stone was laid on January 7, 1995, has just been consecrated, a year later to the day. The service was conducted by Patriarch Alexis (suspected of having once collaborated with the KGB), and attended by Yeltsin (one-time member of the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party) and the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov (member of the same party from 1968 until its banning in 1991).

No expense has been spared, thanks to contributions from "private" unidentified sources, in the best tradition of Yeltsin's Russia. Craftsmen are still laying gold leaf on the roof of the great dome thanks to a donation of 50kg of gold ingots from the private Stolichny Bank. Thousands of builders are still working to put the final touches to the construction. Scaffolding is still up, and Yeltsin wore a construction worker's helmet as he placed the "final" stone.

The new cathedral is identical to its predecessor, which was erected on the banks of the River Moskova, near the Kremlin, to celebrate the Russian victory over Napoleon in 1812. Completed only in 1883 after more than 50 years' building work, it was dynamited in 1931 by the former seminarist Stalin, who wanted to bring the Orthodox Church to its knees.

Stalin intended to replace the cathedral with a gigantic 430-metre-high Palace of the Soviets. But he was prevented from doing so by divine intervention, in the form of unstable riverside soil, the second world war and his own death.

Nikita Khrushchev preferred instead to build a gigantic heated open-air swimming pool on the spot, where people could bathe even in winter. Then, in 1994, the politically ambitious Luzhkov decided to rebuild the church at an estimated cost of $24 million. "It's an act of repentance for what was demolished in the past. Russia is rising up with power and glory," opined Patriarch Alexis.

Any price is worth paying for a "miracle", especially when an election is in offing.

(January 10)

Le Monde

Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

ASSOCIATE CONSULTANTS – CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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* a willingness to respect and value the knowledge and experience of local partner organisations;
* a strong commitment to the values of Save the Children.

For further information and a registration form please contact:
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Telephone: 0181 741 4058. Fax: 0181 741 4505.

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(Number 9628)

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Directed by Dr Ruth Pearson

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ATHENS COLLEGE

COORDINATOR, IB

Athens College in Athens, Greece, announces a search for Coordinator, International Baccalaureate Program.

The Coordinator will report to the High School Principal. He must be familiar with the IB regulations as published in the Vade Mecum, and make all arrangements necessary to begin the program in September 1996.

Qualifications: Academic credentials and experience commensurate with a leadership position in a distinguished independent school. Preference will be given to candidates with experience in an IB program as a teacher and/or coordinator plus demonstrated administrative ability. Fluency in English is required; a working knowledge of Greek desirable.

Application Procedure: Candidates should submit a curriculum vitae (in English) and the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of at least three references to Mr. Spiros Kantas, Director, Lykeion, Athens College (Address: P.O. Box 65005, 15410 Psychico, Athens, Greece-Telephone: 301-6714621, 301-6876810 Telefax: 301-6873273). Screening of applications will begin immediately. Deadline for applications: 1 February 1996.

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salary circa £25,000

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Please send letters of application and full CV in confidence to:
Frances Pope, PLAN International UK, 5-6 Underhill Street, London NW1 7HS
Registered Charity No. 276035.
Closing date: 31/1/96.

Health Unlimited

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Applicants must have: a qualification in nursing, midwifery or medicine and proven experience or qualification in public health or PHC management in a developing country and have worked in a conflict area. The ability to live and work as a member of a small team in a remote, unstable area is essential. Closing date: as soon as possible.

GUATEMALA: PROJECT MANAGER: To join an existing PHC project based in a remote area of the Western Highlands of Guatemala working with Quiche indigenous people. To be responsible for: planning and management of health education activities, supervision and provision of personnel management, accounting (project finance), administrative and logistics support for project activities, liaising and coordinating with the Ministry of Health and funders.

Applicants must have: fluent Spanish, management skills, PHC and overseas development experience, good interpersonal skills and a clean driving licence. Closing date: 10/2/96

Terms and conditions: *contracts for 12 months minimum, flights, insurance and living expenses are provided, both posts are unaccompanied salaries to be confirmed.*

Contact by telephone or fax: Lucy Medd, tel: 0171 928 8105, fax: 0171 928 7736.

Health Unlimited, 3 Stamford Street, London SE1 9NT.

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Both posts will be for an initial contract of two years and will be based in London. Please apply in writing with a CV. The closing date for application for both posts is 31 January 1996.

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Informal enquiries may be addressed to Dr G M Asher, tel: +44 (0) 115 951 5545 or Dr K J Bradley, tel: +44 (0) 115 951 5558

Applicants should send a detailed CV, together with the names of two referees, to Dr G M Asher, Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, The University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD. Closing date: 23 February 1996.



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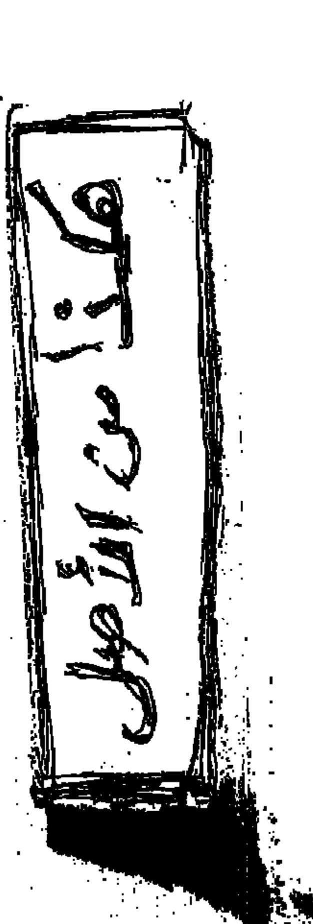
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Notes & Queries

Joseph Harker

WHO FIRST realised the need for an international dateline?

SANDFORD FLEMING (1827-1915) was Canada's foremost railway surveyor and construction engineer. In 1863 he was appointed chief surveyor of the proposed line from Quebec City to Halifax. Every town set its clocks to co-ordinate with the time the sun passed directly overhead, which made train time tables, running mainly east to west across a large continent, a shambles.

In 1879 Fleming presented a proposal for 24 time zones with a standard time for each zone, to the Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Scientific Knowledge. The system was first adopted by Canadian railways and, in 1883, by all North American railways.

He was instrumental in convening the International Prime Meridian Conference in Washington in 1884 and on January 1, 1885 Greenwich Mean Time was established as the meridian of the system.

Sir Sandford Fleming, finally acknowledged by the mother country by a KCMG in 1897, also designed the first Canadian postage stamp, a threepenny beaver, issued in 1851. — *John Bury, Saskatoon, Canada*

HAS there ever been a scientific study of astrology?

MARK GRAUBARD of the University of Minnesota explains in Astrology And Alchemy: Two Fossil Sciences (Philosophical Library, New York, 1953) that astrology has only been considered "unscientific" since the end of the 17th century.

More recently, Michel and Françoise Gauquelin undertook a "scientific investigation of the secrets of astrology" (Birth Times, Hill and Wang, New York, 1983, published in Britain as The Truth About Astrology) which greatly impressed some formerly hard-nosed scientists. Hans Eysenck, of the London University Institute of Psychiatry, commented: "Emotionally, I would prefer the Gauquelins' results not to hold, but rationally, I must accept that they do." — *John King, Kent, Connecticut, USA*

WHAT were the "corresponding societies" of the 18th and 19th centuries? What did they correspond about?

THE CORRESPONDING societies were central in the 1792-96 English agitation for a democracy and written constitution. The London Corresponding Society was formed when nine well-meaning men met in January 1792 to discuss parliamentary reform. They concluded that every adult person, in possession of his reason, and not incapacitated by crimes, should have a vote for a Member of Parliament.

The LCS corresponded with revolutionary and constitutional societies across the country and addressed the French National Convention in 1793. The witch-hunt against the societies began in 1793, and in 1800 the societies were outlawed. — *Peter Sloman, Reading, Berkshire*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ

Railway to the heavens

Controversial plans are afoot to bring tourism to Britain's last wilderness, writes **Robin McKie**

TOURISM chiefs want to open up Britain's last great wilderness, the Cairngorms, to a flood of summer visitors by building a £17 million funicular railway. But tourists using the line, scheduled for completion in three years' time, will be prevented from setting foot on the mountain plateau.

Instead they will be herded into a visitor centre, with only a handful allowed out on ranger-led walks to restricted parts of the plateau's precious ecology.

The proposal will give Britain its first US-style "no-go" wilderness. It has highlighted the dilemma facing those attempting to balance tourism with environmental concerns. The proposed 2km cable-drawn railway is expected to carry about 225,000 tourists up the 1,000m mountain each summer.

The plan to restrict access has infuriated walkers and climbers. "The idea is utterly absurd," said David Morris, of the Ramblers' Association. "Taking tourists up a mountain and then preventing them going out to walk on it is offensive."

But the alternative horrifies others, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which owns a 128sq km estate, its largest in Britain, on Cairngorm. This is a sanctuary for the dotterel, golden eagle, ptarmigan, and other rare birds. "Many feed off insects that live on Cairngorm's rare sedges, lichens and mosses," said RSPB officer David Minns. "Essentially this is an Arctic plateau. The soil is very thin and would be ruined if walked over by large numbers of people."

The society has also opposed the rail scheme. "Can planners really be sure they can fence in people within the heritage centre?" said Mr Minns. "We would have to be convinced they could before we dropped our objection."



Top of the world . . . the proposed funicular railway in the Cairngorms would ease the present long queues suffered by skiers

The scheme's proposer, the Cairngorm Chairlift Company, says it has been forced to make restrictions by Scottish Natural Heritage. The company operates a chairlift for skiers that is 35 years old. This cannot run for a third of its operating time because of high winds.

However, a railway would both be less susceptible to weather problems and faster, easing the present long queues for skiers. The line would follow the route of the present chairlift (which would be dismantled) and end at a visitor centre fitted with a 250-seat restaurant, video screens, and a viewing area near the mountain top.

The project is expensive, though if approved this year it will attract £2 million in European Union support, on top of an £8 million government grant.

"The problem will not be the winter user, who simply skies back down, but our hourly uplift of 500 passengers in summer," admitted company chairman Hamish Swan. "They could wander all over the place, and Scottish Natural Heritage officials have spent more than a year worrying about how to control them."

At present, access to the Cairngorm plateau, which is frequently swept by gales and blizzards, is restricted by its daunting remoteness and size.

Only the hardy venture there on foot, though a few others use the chairlift, which also operates in summer. However, a 17-minute ride on it, in a fine, cold Scottish summer drizzle, is an unappetising experience for tourists.

The plan will be debated at a full Scottish Natural Heritage board meeting in February.

Letter from the Maldives Carole Hunter

It never rains but it pours

TORRENTS. That's how it falls in Meedhoo. The clouds build up like packs of wolves waiting to go on the prowl. Then they let loose with all their aggression, spitting and swiping. We're in the middle of the monsoon season — the time when the water table rises above the surface, flooding the sandy streets and providing new homes for eels and frogs of all descriptions. I love this time of year: cool nights (sometimes so cool that I'll have to pull a sheet over me), where sleep becomes an achievable art as I drift off to the sound of tiny bubbles bursting on the roof-top. Life suddenly becomes fresher, brighter, renewed.

We now have two resident frogs in our house. They hop about under the light, waiting for the insects to fall. I'm not sure where they go when the island's generator winds down at 11pm, their food cut short in a split second, their frenzy of feeding over.

After a night of heavy rain, Meedhoo women rise to the sound of a hundred cocks stretching their vocal chords. Everywhere you can hear water being scooped up from the wells, people preparing for their morning wash. In the darkness I'm struggling to find the courage to pour my own bucket of cold water over me as rain still drizzles down from above. Our bathroom is in the open air, and as I look up I'm surprised to see two white fairy terns still sitting in the screwpine outside. They look so cold, huddled together in their forked branch, feathers ruffled against the wind. I look into the well, almost filled to the brim now with the night's rain, and add my contribution to the symphony of splashes filling the air.

Walking to school I have to wade through the water which comes up past my ankles. I balance my umbrella between my shoulder and neck while lifting the trousers of my Pakistani dress up from the water. Wading is the worst part of the wet season. I feel like an ice-skater whose legs have decided to move in slow motion in contrast to the rest of the body.

At school we suffer for the necessity of having open-sided classrooms where, during the dry season, cool air can pass through our fanless rooms. Rain pours in as we rearrange the desks, moving them closer to the centre of the room. It becomes heavier and we struggle to hear each other over the beating on our iron roof. We laugh together, and realise it may be time for jotting down a few exercises from the board.

Back at home, I've collected a container of rainwater which should last me for the week. Some of the children come around and we share a joke on the *indholi*, the traditional Maldivian swing.

Mara arrives, bearing a plate of *boashi*, banana flowers fried with chilli, onion and spices and some *folhi*, a type of unleavened bread. This is the usual food eaten when it rains heavily and we are unable to go out to collect the ingredients, grind the spices and grate the coconut for our usual curries. I'm grateful. I was going to cook two-minute noodles. She complains that she always shivers in the rain, and asks about rain in Australia. We chat for a long time, wondering about the cold of snow, the floods in other countries while, all the time, the rain beats down.

I love this time of year.

A Country Diary

Alan Scarth

WINNIPEG: Since late October, when an Indian summer died prematurely at the hand of an early blizzard, this winter has been brutal even by the standards of our hardy prairie city.

Blizzard has succeeded blizzard and major highways have been blocked. Snow to a depth of 12 inches accumulated on the windswept prairie, and three times that in the woods. Temperatures dropped to -20C with some seasonal record dips to -35C. Tempers became short, the city's snow-clearing budget was exhausted, and our resident white-tailed deer were declared to be at risk.

By Christmas, daytime temperatures had struggled back up to -10C, and we went to the Fort Whyte Centre to check on the deer. Tracts of aspen forest have been preserved and the white-tails thrive despite the suburban dogs, which are bolder predators than their rural counterparts, the coyotes.

We put on snowshoes and headed into the woods. Within a few minutes, we came upon a doe who was breaking trail for her two seven-month fawns. They followed close behind, only their heads and necks visible above the snow line. They were preoccupied with making their way to the dwindling supply of accessible twigs which are their winter mainstay, and were almost oblivious of us.

In a normal year they would have been out on the nearby fields, feeding on the remnants of the harvest. But this year energy needs to be preserved and pawing down through the wind-packed snow is less efficient than moving through the bush to find the daily ration of several thousand twigs.

As we reached the roadway at the other side of the forest, a lorry was unloading a pile of alfalfa screenings, donated to the centre by a nearby processing plant for use as deer feed. Some biologists advise against feeding the deer, arguing that it interferes with the process of selection and adaptation to our northern environment.

The Virginia white-tail is a relative newcomer to the Canadian prairies, having moved north only a century ago after the millions of plains bison were extirpated, and the homesteaders' woodlots made the once treeless landscapes hospitable. These deer, the biologists argue, have adapted to extremes of climate in every corner of the continent. If no one puts out feed, there will be some winterkill, but the survivors will be better equipped to cope with future hard winters.

The citizens of this hospitable city hear this well-meant advice and cheerfully ignore it. They buy bales of hay for the same deer they were swearing at during the summer for encroaching on their flower beds.

As we tramped home we reflected that this is the season of generosity, untempered by ecological notions of reducing surplus populations.

Archaeology's new defenders

As Britain rips up its human past, **George Monbiot** finds modern anarchists fighting on the side of history

IN Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent, written in 1907, a group of anarchists had decided that shooting politicians was a less effective means of undermining the morale of the nation than destroying national monuments. They launched a plot to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, and the government set about trying to outwit them.

Today, it is government that is destroying Britain's national monuments, and the anarchists who are trying to save them.

One could be forgiven for believing that the Government is engaged in a deliberate assault on the archaeological fabric of the nation, when one considers the impending destruction of the Mesolithic, Roman and Civil War sites at Newbury, the appalling mismanagement of Stonehenge, the ripping of Twyford Down from the landscape, the granting of "Class Consents" permitting farmers to plough over Scheduled Ancient Monuments, the Ministry of Defence's repeated obliteration of features on Salisbury Plain, and the relaxation of planning constraints in Wales.

The anarchists, by contrast, could not have associated themselves more clearly with Britain's national monuments. The Dongas tribe named themselves after a set of archaeological features. Archaeology has, arguably, been even more important to roads protesters than wildlife. Many have been arrested for no less heinous a crime than trying to protect Britain's heritage. So what has gone wrong?

In August last year, 30 lean, suntanned, scruffy people pulled their handcarts, goats, donkeys and bow-topped wagons to the top of Tan Hill, near Devizes, in Wiltshire. They claimed that a Royal Charter, issued in 1499, entitled them to hold a fair at Lammas on the summit.

The police arrived in six riot vans, three dog vans and a helicopter. As the revellers trooped back down the hill, the officer in charge said: "When will you people realise that this is Wiltshire, and you don't belong here?"

Belonging, of course, is what the struggle to protect Britain's archaeology is all about.

Seven miles from Tan Hill, in the tiny country park surrounding Barbury Castle, every square metre of land has a story to tell. As well as the ditched ramparts of the Iron Age hill fort, there are Celtic field boundaries, Bronze Age barrows, and Neolithic tracks. Standing on the earthworks, you can't help but be aware that you are part of something — the land and its history extend ineluctably into you.

The lands surrounding the country park were once just as rich in human history, but today the bleak chalk rubble of a single harrowed field runs all the way down the valley that the fort overlooks. Beyond it, the insult has been compounded, for after just a few years of producing grain which no one wanted, the newly effaced earth has been left to the weeds.

The farmers argue that their ploughing is an historical process. The difference, of course, is that the processes evident at Barbury Castle took place one on top of another; modern ploughing, by contrast, sweeps away everything that has gone before. We do not belong here, for there is nothing to belong to.

The hippies at Tan Hill were removed, the police said, because they posed a threat to the land. Yet no riot vans or helicopters turned up when Wiltshire farmers engaged in some of the most wanton acts of vandalism since the sacking of Constantinople. Far from it — they were paid by the state to do it.



Worlds apart . . . police and protesters at Newbury last week

This is not to suggest, of course, that the Government, or the European Union, really are setting out deliberately to obliterate the archaeological record, but it does seem that they couldn't care less about its disappearance.

There are, as yet, no comprehensive figures for the rates of loss of archaeological remains, but it's likely that most of the record has already gone. Most alarmingly, there are no reliable means of protecting the rest. Farmers can destroy unscheduled (unprotected) ancient monuments without consulting anyone.

Archaeology is, of course, the definitive non-renewable resource. Historical sites don't breed, and the pathetic attempts to recreate them merely render them meaningless.

The loss of our archaeology is like amnesia. Of the 450,000 years of human habitation of the British Isles, only the last 1,500 have been recorded — and that somewhat patchily — in writing. For the remainder, we have to rely entirely on what the land has to tell us.

Direct activists have carried the burden of archaeological defence because archaeologists have been lamentably slow to respond to the destruction. Archaeological conservation has been taught to undergraduates only for the last 10 years — the discipline is more or less where nature conservation was 20 years ago. Part of the reason is that many academics have been party to the crime. Most of the opportunities for excavation are provided by developers building roads, housing estates or superstores.

But the discipline is rapidly waking up. Last month, the magazine of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) lambasted the Government's Rural White Paper, which scarcely mentioned the historical environment. The CBA is calling for consideration of the wider landscape — not just isolated sites — and for environmental protection to be firmly linked to farm subsidies.

Next month, the collection of data will be completed for Bournemouth University's "Monuments At Risk" survey; the findings are expected to show that there are about one million recognised archaeological sites in England, of which only 15,000 have been scheduled. In 18 months, the survey should be able to tell us how fast they are disappearing.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the Government will pay the blindest bit of notice. The 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act is a caricature of misunderstanding and outdated thinking.

The Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage are starting a "countryside character programme", recommending that certain landscapes be given special treatment by planners.

While the idea has its virtues, most of the threats to archaeological remains come from farm and forestry activities which lie outside the planning process. This month, the Government was due to publish a Heritage Green Paper, but it has been delayed. In theory, it will be a great opportunity to put the many glaring anomalies right. Archaeologists aren't holding their breath, however.

The Tan Hill Fair eventually took place — not on the hilltop, but in a green lane two miles away. For three days, 200 people rode horses with painted flanks and plaited tails, drank mead, danced to the music of fiddles and mandolins, and ate fat hen picked from a nearby field in set-aside. But then they were thrown off the land by the police.

Something happened in those days which subtly changed the lives of everyone who roistered there. It is hard to tell what it was, but it felt like the future, swimming up slowly from the depths of the past.

Censors invade cyberspace

Azeem Azhar on how the Internet is turning into a moral and legal maze

WHEN CompuServe, a US-based online service, last month suspended worldwide access to more than 200 Internet forums because of German concerns that they might contain illegal pornography, it probably hoped that the world's attention would be distracted by festive cheer. It was wrong. The Ohio-based company had stirred a hornets' nest. By acquiescing to the demands of a regional court in Bavaria that it deny access to certain material held on its system, CompuServe imposed a veil of censorship on its 4 million users, whether they lived in Aberdeen, Amsterdam or Albuquerque. Suddenly that Munich court order had rippled across the world and CompuServe's actions had become not simply the most far-reaching example of Internet censorship, but a perfect example of the difficulty of making sense of law in the global village.

The facts of the case are simple enough. CompuServe is a consumer online-service provider. Anyone with a personal computer and a modem can, for a fee, dial into CompuServe and send electronic mail and participate in special interest groups, ranging from Beatlemania to beetle-collecting. Additionally, CompuServe offers access to the Internet, from its vast databases of computer programs to the World-Wide Web and the source of the recent trouble, Usenet newsgroups, open-ended discussion forums.

German police raided CompuServe's Munich office looking for pornographic material, and eventually obtained a mandate to ban 200 newsgroups. Among the obviously pornographic (such as alt.sex.fetish.feet, and alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male) you can find the sensitive (shamash.gayjews) and the ludicrous (alt.sexy.bald.captains). CompuServe imposed the ban globally rather than just in Germany, because its software isn't sophisticated enough to limit material on a regional basis.

The repercussions are more complex, and reach beyond CompuServe to the Internet itself. CompuServe argues that it was stuck between a rock and a hard place. "The principle is if you want to do business in a country, you comply with the laws of that country," claimed the company.

The problem is that, much as the company denies it, a precedent has been set. The fear is that CompuServe's acquiesence will open the floodgates, as governments try to censor and regulate the Internet. "If the Iranians object to something that can be banned if the Burmese object to something that can be banned, and if the African states object to something that can be banned, there's nothing left to say. Free speech is out of the window," says John Browning, editor of the British edition of Wired magazine.

Traditionally, Internet service providers, which differ from CompuServe because they do not provide any content of their own, have avoided any liability for material users can access through them. "We maintain a policy of common carrier: if someone complains, we just say 'We only provide the infrastructure, not the content'," says Steve Kennedy of Demon, one of Britain's largest Internet providers. But as these providers become more global and as the Internet assumes a greater importance in everyday discourse and behaviour, the temptation for governments to intervene will increase.

One problem is that, in most cases, those doing the regulating won't understand the technology. As Demon's Kennedy explains: "We can't censor [Internet] news. The Net is global and it's a mockery to try to restrict it regionally. There is simply no difference accessing it internationally or nationally." Confounding potential attempts to regulate content is the Internet's structure itself. As the online adage puts it: The Net interprets censorship and routes round it.

"Governments need to understand that cyberspace is a different territory," says Esther Dyson, president of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a free-speech public policy group. "While they can't restrict their own population, they can have an impact outside their own borders." Contradictory legislation and conflicting legal obligations from different jurisdictions will also harm business, as the Internet becomes an everyday part of office life.

Most experts agree that the best way out is an international agreement on what is allowed and what isn't, and who is liable for illegal material. But they also agree that such a utopian solution is unlikely to be achieved: "They just won't get it together," says Rob Carolina, an Internet expert with law firm Clifford Chance.

When you're dealing with pornography, and what is essentially publishing, any international agreement is even less likely. "When it comes to culturally sensitive issues it gets a lot harder," says Carolina. It isn't hard to imagine a time when Paris clamps down on the excessive use of English in electronic mail.

Dyson and the EFF hope that this pan-cultural, multi-lingual legal minefield can be avoided. "There is a fair amount of complexity here," she says with understatement, "but there are other ways [than the courts] to block this stuff." New technology will be the first step down this route. Already programs are available which deny Net surfers access to pornography. Until those are commonplace, the problem facing the Internet and the online world is to ensure that hasty steps, like those taken by the Germans, don't do it unnecessary damage.

Spinning out the bard's small change

Peter Brook, Britain's most influential director, is *Shakespeare's latest spin doctor*, as a vibrant Hamlet in Paris proves, writes **Michael Billington**



Qui Est La, an extraordinary reflection on acting, performance and mimesis PHOTOGRAPH: MARC ENGUERAND

PETER BROOK at 70 remains British theatre's most dedicated explorer. His new show, Qui Est La, playing at the Bouffes du Nord in Paris, is an extraordinary mosaic in which scenes from Hamlet are interspersed with passages from Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, Craig, Artaud and the Noh master Zeami. The result is spare, economical and illuminating: a meditation not just on Shakespeare and the mystery of theatre but on life, death and the transforming power of the imagination.

Hamlet is a natural starting-point for Brook's inquiries: the most self-consciously theatrical of all Shakespeare's plays with its endless reflections on acting, performance and mimesis. Brook also starts by reminding us that any line of text is open to multiple interpretations. David Bennent bounds on to a rectangular wooden platform offering varying versions of the play's opening line — "Qui est la?" — only to be greeted each time by Yoshi Oida as a Brook-like director with a cry of "Non, ce n'est pas ça". It reminds us not just of the ambiguity of text but *of Brecht's point that one of the* pleasures of theatre is rolling each sentence and gesture around in the hand like a beggar weighing up his small change.

If any general theme emerges both from the Hamlet fragments and from the interspersed commentary, it is that theatre can never be an exact imitation of life: that it is not a mirror but a magnifying glass and that everything depends upon an imaginative conspiracy between actor and spectator. "To play a drunk," says Bruce Myers at one point, "it is not necessary to behave like a drunk." Another passage reminds us of the power of affective memory: of the way an actor in summoning up the appropriate emotion for a scene involving a street accident has to rely not on reality but on some parallel image from his own past. And, in a remarkable demonstration of Meyerholdian bio-mechanics, we see how the actor transfers all his energy from the heart to a particular part of the body: thus if he points his finger skywards to indicate the moon, we come to believe in the moon's reality because of the energy invested in the moment.

What prevents the show simply being a stylistic exercise or a lesson in theatrical theory is that everything is constantly related to Hamlet. The death of Polonius is a classic example. Myers indicates the arras by holding a green curtain vertically in front of his body: once he is stabbed he disappears and the curtain simply becomes a horizontal heap. We are then reminded that in the Japanese theatre, death is indicated by a cloth which allows the actor to disappear with silence and discretion while in the Chinese theatre he jumps up in the air before dropping to the floor. Each theatre has its own customs: what unites them is that they offer a metaphor rather than a literal transcription of human experience.

In many ways, Qui Est La reminds me of Brook's previous production, Homme Qui. This was based on the Oliver Sacks work, The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat, and was a compassionate study of neurological disorder in which the stage took on the role of a research laboratory. And in this show, Brook again uses the theatre as a place of intellectual and emotional inquiry: what he is exploring *is the whole meaning of representa*tion, of how the theatre accommodates life and of how the symbolism of gesture varies between cultures. When a western actor touches his head it indicates thought: when a Balinese actor does the same thing, it suggests the memory of a lost third eye and inner consciousness.

But what gives the show its vibrancy is the simplicity of Brook's staging. The Ghost's paternal concern for Hamlet is registered by the way the long, tapering fingers of Sotigul Kouyate lovingly caress his son's head. The play-scene acquires unusual urgency when Hamlet forces Claudius himself to pour the lethal poison into the actor's ear. And the graveyard scene becomes the climax to the play as if its meditations on mortality express Shakespeare's essential meaning.

Obviously this is just a piece of Hamlet. But behind the show I sense a strong personal impulse. It is as if Brook is exploring his life-long fascination with Shakespeare and attempting to rediscover what during the evening is called "the purity of our initial reaction" to a play like Hamlet. With his seven international actors and single musician he is also expressing "un joie créatrice, un élan interieur" that lies at the heart of making theatre. And, not least, he is suggesting that while theatre is ephemeral, the imagination has the power to seize the moment and arrest mortality.

Kenneth Tynan wrote in 1953 that, as a director, the young Peter Brook "cooked with cream, blood and spices". Late Brook, in contrast, uses the simplest ingredients and treats theatre both as a form of philosophical inquiry and as a moving exploration of the human condition.

Down but not out in Paris café society

OPERA
Michael Billington

JONATHAN MILLER'S new production of La Bohème at the Bastille Opera in Paris has not been without its problems. Roberto Alagna, the star-tenor who sings Rodolfo in one of the two separate casts, caused a storm early in the run by refusing to take a curtain call because of "differences with the artists".

He went on to claim that he will never sing at the Bastille again. But, whatever the temperamental problems backstage, the old piece comes across with remarkable freshness.

Puccini's opera is, of course, set in Paris in 1830. Miller updates it to roughly 1930. Posters of Jean Harlow in Hell's Angels and of René Clair's Sous les Toits de Paris decorate the walls of the Bohemian garret, and Dante Ferretti's designs are clearly based on the realistic photographs of Andre Kertesz: the Café Momus is a slightly shabby, sub-fusc affair, and the street-walls in the third act are decorated with peeling pictures of a famous silhouetted Dubonnet advertisement.

As Baz Luhrmann's 1950s-set version, shown on television over Christmas, proved, La Bohème is an opera that can withstand updating. But for the first two acts Miller's production slightly hung fire. Crucial plot points, such as the fact that Rodolfo deliberately hides Mimi's latchkey, got lost on the large Bastille stage. And the prevailing greyness of the costumes at the Café Momus meant the principals were submerged in the general mêlée: only with the arrival of Valerie Millot's Musetta, hoisting her skirt up to attract Marcello's attention, did the production begin to match the music's exuberance.

But Miller's realistic emphasis on the poverty, cold and deprivation of Bohemian life pays superb dividends in the last two acts. His strength, as always, lies in individual psychology; and the encounter of Rodolfo and Mimi in a freezing suburban street reeking of decay was filled with exactly the right mixture of guilt, sadness and hopeless optimism.

The Chilean soprano, Cristina Gallardo-Domas, showed she is a world-class Mimi not just in her sweetness of tone but in her sudden shocked awareness of her impending death. The final act was also overwhelming in the characters' embarrassment in the face of Mimi's mortality.

Miller's view of the opera is deliberately unromantic and low key: even the occasional raffish outbursts of high spirits seem a way of keeping poverty and misery at bay. Although the production would benefit from a smaller house, it was sensitively conducted by Louis Langree and well sung. Roberto Aronica may be no Alagna but he brought a ringing Italian tone to Rodolfo, while Gallardo-Domas, who goes on to sing the role at the Met, endowed Mimi with a Butterfly-like poignancy and grace.

Tut, tut for the tit, tat of Las Vegas

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

THREE movies will shortly be opening in Britain that are centred on purgatorial Las Vegas. The first to heave into view is Paul Verhoeven's already excoriated Showgirls. The other two are Martin Scorsese's Casino and Mike Figgis's Leaving Las Vegas — better bets all round. But which delivers the most accurate portrait of this appalling city? In an odd way, it's probably **Showgirls**.

Verhoeven is a very clever director who has made a very shallow and ultimately rather silly film. Accuracy of observation is not enough when it's simply a matter of showing us what Las Vegas looks like, what it does to people, if the people shown are ciphers in the first place. And the main problem with this very credible portrait is that there's no sympathy for anyone, even the absurdly named Nomi, a young prostitute and former crack addict who goes to the City of Sin to make out as an erotic dancer. The fact that she is played by Elizabeth Berkley, an ingénue who looks like a down-market Juliette Lewis, doesn't help.

As for the film as a whole, it slowly but surely becomes a giant and garish reflection of what it is presumably attacking. Yet, though bumping and grinding along for about 20 minutes too many, the film remains oddly watchable. The strip-joint sequences at the Cheetah Club, where the girls are no better than they ought to be but cattily transcend their sleazy environment, are fine. But what we are chiefly asked to goggle at is the pomaded flesh on display, rather as if at any moment Verhoeven is going to provide us with a real porno movie, but never quite dares.

What we won't see in the British version of Showgirls is the extended rape scene — in which Molly, the black girl who befriends Nomi, is abused by William Shockley's *outré* rock star and his henchmen. I'm quite grateful I didn't. But at least it would have shown the dark reverse side of the don't-touch sexuality the rest of the movie specialises in.

Elsewhere, all we see is a view of women controlled by men which demeans both sexes, since the only way women can succeed is by exploiting their bodies and the best way men can do the same is to pocket the cash thus generated. It's a view of America which at least has the merit of capsizing Bob Dole's and Newt Gingrich's pet theories while at the same time confirming them. But that's not enough to sustain a film which delivers more waxed pudenda, smoothed-off bums and rather frighteningly pointed tits than food for other than masturbatory thought.

The line "Everybody was peeing on my head and telling me it was rain", spoken by Denzel Washington in **Devil in a Blue Dress**, is what you would expect to hear in a contemporary film noir. But it comes as a bit of a shock as it isn't immediately apparent that Carl Franklin's film is anything of the sort.

The reason the penny doesn't drop is because Franklin has more in mind than a crime thriller. Devil In A Blue Dress, taken from Walter Mosley's novel, is as much about racism as murder, and it paints a picture of Los Angeles in the late 1940s that uses the genre in an intriguingly different way.

Easy Rawlins (Washington) is a former GI and laid-off aircraft worker who has a house in LA and a desperate need to keep up his mortgage payments. He is offered money to find a white woman, the betrothed of a mayoral candidate, who is known to frequent black bars. Desperate for cash, he takes up the challenge which leads him into deeper and deeper waters.

The plot remains pretty faithful to the book while casting its net a good deal wider. Franklin paints the post-war scene with very credible detail, so that you see how corruption and racism often go hand in hand. In fact, the pulp tradition upon which it is based is constantly offset by a visual commentary that might do for our own times if it wasn't set so well in period. The emotional detail is as important as any of the plot turns.

Washington brings to his part a genuine feeling as Easy falls deeper into the mire, and both Don Cheadle, as the owner of the black bar in which we first find him, and Tom Sizemore as the white man who offers him money are equally good.

The sense that nothing of this sort would happen to Easy if he were white is almost palpable. And the whole film becomes as much a portrait of the modern Babylon through which he walks as of a crime story that happens to involve black Americans.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Fright at the opera

The Royal Opera House is at the centre of an internal storm of ego, spite and whimsy. **Joanna Coles** reports

NO ONE at the Royal Opera House appears to know what has happened to Andrew Follon. Not even those working in the box office, which he used to manage. "No idea," says the man from behind the display of black canvas Royal Opera House bags which retail in the shop for £13.95. "No idea," he shrugs before going back to his crossword.

This week their collective memories were jogged. Courtesy of BBC Television's The House, a fly-on-the-wall documentary about the ROH, the entire nation was able to witness Andrew Follon's humiliation as his bosses discuss his prospects at a private meeting.

Private that is, except for a camera crew recording a year in the life of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

"I think Andrew is still a problem," we see the public affairs director, Keith Cooper, confide to Jeremy Isaacs, the ROH's general director. "I don't think he is capable *to run the box office* as it needs to be run . . . nor the seniority nor the intelligence to cope with the software. We've done the best we can . . . supported him. I don't think he has the intelligence, the *intelligence*, to deliver what we expect."

The problem in the box office, it transpires, is due to understaffing, which means the punter often has to wait several minutes before the box office phone is answered. Unfortunately for Mr Follon, he took the rap and was asked to resign. We can only hope his parents aren't watching.

Jeremy Isaacs gets up from his desk, throws his right leg over the arm of his chair and sinks slowly into the soft black leather. "I do regret that bit," he says sheepishly. "It's not a happy state of affairs that people should be exposed that way."

What he means, of course, is he thinks it unfortunate that junior people, unimportant people, should be exposed in that way. For Isaacs himself is used to it; indeed you sense he relishes the attention, thrives on the drama. It was a brave decision to give a camera crew free range — you can be sure the BBC wouldn't be caught doing anything so rash. But no, he says, he has few regrets about letting the director Michael Waldman and his crew wander freely throughout the Opera House for an entire year. He would do it all again tomorrow.

Oh, he wishes he had been more specific about certain areas he wanted them to cover. Perhaps tracing the entire staging of a new show from concept to first night. "I missed a trick," he confesses, in not demanding that they cover certain themes coherently. But otherwise it seems OK to him. After all, the public are entitled to see what goes on inside one of the world's greatest opera houses. And, boy, what goes on is enough to make the Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, hurl herself over the battlements alongside Tosca.

Forget the posturing of Pavarotti and the tantrums of the three tenors, it's the management who stamp their feet and swagger round the Opera House.

After just one episode of The House, one cannot help but think Isaacs's confidence in the programme may be misplaced. What emerges to outsiders from the six-hour series is a devastating portrait of the arts in Britain. Of an opera house in a permanent state of crisis, run by chaotic managers alternatively motivated by ego, spite and whimsy. We are presented with a director of public affairs (Keith Cooper) who has no hesitation in dumping on his staff and throwing telephones to the floor in a temper tantrum, an opera director (Nicholas Payne) who seems strangely out of tune with his conductors, and an Arts Council which gamely concludes that if the Royal Opera House were to close for a couple of years it would save everyone a helpful £40 million.

It is the access into the hallowed meetings at the Arts Council — where clients are forced to beg for funds — which those working in the arts will find most revealing. As the Council staff murmur their soothing but empty management phrases, Isaacs eventually loses his rag. "I thought we were partners in something," he roars, as the Council's accountant toys with the ideas of a temporary closure. "If you can't help us we'll find the money ourselves," he yells (which is, of course, exactly what the Council wants). He then attacks it for refusing to stick up for itself when demanding cash for the arts from the Heritage Department. "Year after year you say to the Government 'Thank you for telling us how much money we've got, of course we'll have to get by on that'. No other society would carry on like this."

In this, at least, Isaacs is right. No other western society expects its leading opera house to survive on such a small subsidy. Though the Arts Council gives around £15 million to both the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet, it is a comparatively small sum and has to fund two entirely separate companies. In New York the Metropolitan Opera runs off an endowment of $130 million. The Opera House at the Bastille in Paris cost £300 million to build and that was 10 years ago. And it's no wonder its ticket prices are half the price of Covent Garden — its annual subsidy is £60 million.

By contrast there was a public outcry in Britain when the ROH was granted a one-off sum of £78.5 million from Lottery funding to renovate its ancient building — so dilapidated backstage that the rain drips in and a member of the stage crew was crushed to death by ancient machinery.

In theory, a serious television programme exposing the difficulties of those running the ROH could have been a wonderful opportunity to persuade the public, first how well it has done in the circumstances and, second, how vigorously it should be supported. Instead, what emerges is an unsympathetic institution run on four-star arrogance, especially when it comes to sticking within a budget.

Payne is seen advising one designer to go "you know, for a £60,000 overspend rather than a £100,000 overspend". No doubt this happens in all sorts of businesses but was it wise to allow the cameras to film such conversations, which can easily be misinterpreted?

ISAAC'S passion for opera and for the House itself is never in doubt. Neither is the hard work of much of the staff as they struggle against all sorts of odds to get it right on the night. Which, to be fair, it often is. Alas, you wouldn't always know this from the series, which concentrates more on the management than the actual music. But you can see the film-maker's temptation. Time after time the management clodhops into situations which backfire both in personal and PR terms.

Due to extensive redevelopment, which will take at least two years, the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet will be temporarily deprived of their home. At the moment there is no guarantee they will find somewhere else to house them for the gap years.

In Paris, New York or Berlin, this would be a scandal. It is not to Covent Garden's credit that London's public appears utterly indifferent.

Jeremy Isaacs . . . 'It's not a happy state of affairs' PHOTO: DAVID SILLITOE

Help is at hand for the single, desperate and ugly

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

THERE were these two guys in ties. Brian, whom one would have described as wide-eyed if he hadn't been Chinese, approached a colleague. "Hey, Peter!" he said. "Can you give me some advice? My girlfriend and I have talked about getting married, but I wonder if it will hinder my career?"

How often one puzzles over delicate, personal problems like this and how seldom one gets a helpful response from an office colleague.

Peter put one arm round Brian's shoulders in a rather wooden way and picked up a flattering family photo with the other. "Marriage," he said, "has made me more stable, more understanding and helped build my career. Get married, Brian!" This was a government commercial. Singapore, which takes a firm grip on its wriggling citizenry, observed that young, well-educated men and women, particularly women, are failing to marry and procreate. So it is running a velvet-gloved but iron-fisted advertising campaign for graduates and a dating agency for graduates called the Social Development Unit. Or Single, Desperate and Ugly by the irreverent. There is always someone to spoil it, isn't there?

Singapore Singles (Under The Sun, BBC2) followed Rosemary, Madeline and Kee Chuan in their search for a partner through the SDU. They were all professionally successful, charming, thirtyish and, by western standards, very young for their age. Men and women are not encouraged to mix until they finish their education and start work, so sexually they are 10 years adrift.

The SDU took a party away for a romantic weekend in a fisherman's cottage, very wisely deserted by the fisherman. "I expected it to be a bit more fancy," said Madeline, who lives in some comfort with a large quantity of fluffy toys. They played party games with balloons and sang Love Me Tender, the potent, cheap music floating away on the water.

"It was OK," said Madeline. "It was OK I guess," said Rosemary. They had rejected all overtures from smitten suitors. "It was great," said Kee Chaun. He had snapped up a girl called Serena.

Personally, I look forward eagerly to a later programme in this series, about the 33-stone King of Tonga hopelessly dieting as his devoted people prepare a big blow-out of roast pig for his 75th birthday.

The weight of royalty in Tonga is a solid-however-you-slice-it certainty in a shifting world. If kings were fatter, they would be a lot more popular. We haven't had a really jolly monarch since Edward VII, Tum-Tum to his chums. The sight of their king, wobbling around on his bicycle, raises all loyal Tongan hearts. I expect they greet him with cries of "Hurrah for Taufa'ahau Tupou the Fourth!"

I was tremendously taken by **Watchdog: Beauty Special's** (BBC1) new perfume, Journaliste. Noting how much clear profit can be made from a shrewdly marketed smell, *they went through the* motions of launching their own.

Half the battle, they were advised, was a great name. A creative team of 10 fine minds laboured for 20 throbbing hours over this one and alighted on Journaliste. I was suffused with a pretty warm glow while, admittedly, wondering if they had they ever smelled one.

It reminded me of The Producers — I hardly know why — on the subject of actors. Zero Mostel advocates shooting the lot of them. Gene Wilder demurs: "Actors are not animals. They are human beings." "They are?" said Zero incredulously. "Have you ever eaten with one?"

Gangsta's little gun sets Britain ablaze

MUSIC
Caroline Sullivan

FOR ALL its notoriety, American gangsta rap hasn't caught on in Britain. Even when a gangsta single entered the British charts at No 1 in October, it felt more like a fluke than a signal that the gangstas were coming for your children. There's a long way to go before the genre's increasingly hysterical sexism and black-on-black violence is as popular in Britain as in the States.

That isn't to belittle either the song in question, Gangsta's Paradise, or its creator, Coolio. Based on a haunting Stevie Wonder chorus, it was one of the truly magnificent records of last year. The 23-year-old Los Angeleno deserved every ounce of the acclaim.

Coolio is not, however, one of gangsta's big guns. Before his hit, he was best known for party anthems and an antennae-like hairdo. Though he possessed the South Central LA provence, he was trailing in the wake of innovators like Doctor Dre.

Paradise has transformed him into a major contender. Despite this, he hasn't the fiery talent of Dre or New York's ferocious Wu Tang Clan. The album's strongest point is that it covers topics that *don't often* find their way into gangsta-funk, like safe sex and responsible fatherhood, which is all very commendable, but not enough to carry a whole album or gig.



Coolio: major contender

At his first major British date at The Grand in south London, Coolio sensibly acknowledged his limitations. Instead of compelling us to tolerate a one-man set of samey breakbeats, he put on a capital S show.

First on was LV, whose girth suggests his initials stand for Luncheon Voucher. He was once hit nine times in a drive-by shooting, but was a picture of sexy health here, teasing the many girls with insinuating versions of old R&B hits before turning the stage over to Coolio.

Antennae crumpled into soft *tufts*, Coolio ambled on accompanied by three synchro-rapper dancers. Unusually for the star of the show, he allowed the others an equal share of the spotlight — so much so that you often wondered who the star was.

Just as it was starting to go on too long, an entire backing band strolled on and Coolio invited four young MCs from the crowd on stage and it all turned into an old-fashioned singing, dancing revue. The difference was that Coolio was telling the fans how he'd like to drop off some beer and a spliff at Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty wouldn't have been amused, but 1,500 other people were.

The facts of life

James Wood

Cross Channel
by Julian Barnes
Cape 211pp £13.99

TO SAY that Julian Barnes is more of an essayist than a novelist is merely to note that his journalism is indistinguishable — in tone, style, and world-making power — from his fiction. In a sense, all his fiction is a Letter from London: it makes direct and often attractive address, it re-shuffles reality's hand but does not invent a new game.

This collection of stories, despite its delights, is essentially essayistic. It has the tidiness of the undistressed or undiscovered; of something already known. Barnes will not smart the world into novelty if he can calm it into summation. His fictional narratives are beguiling because they combine a confidence about the known with a cheeriness about the unknown. Barnes is celebrated for the plump and waxy health of his ideas, for the way he proposes riddles and mysteries. But in Barnes's world the mysteries he poses are a little clearer for having been posed at all; enunciation clears the air, and is better than silence. Barnes believes that comprehension is perfectible.

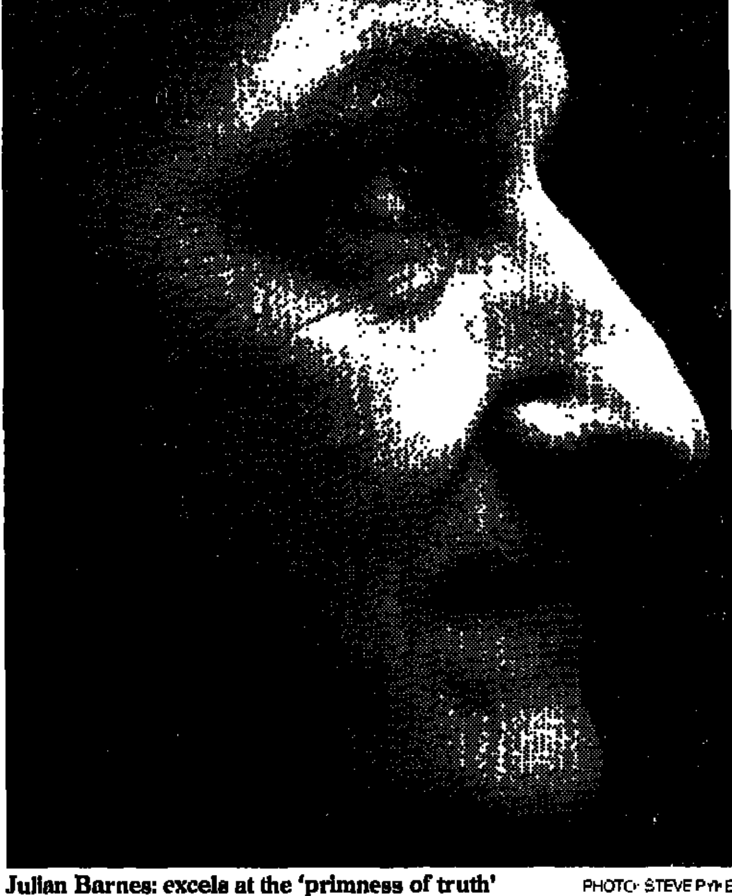
This is why his fiction is so attracted to facts. Facts startle and soothe. They offer the riddle of their strangeness — cricket was last played at the Olympics in 1900, in Los Angeles, according to one of Barnes's protagonists in this book — and then the satisfaction of their impregnability. You can learn a lot of facts from this collection — about viticulture, about France's last surviving slagheap (at Lille, were you interested), about the Tour de France — and his stories share with their facts a similarly enticing and soothing peristalsis.

These stories are tidy even in distress. They are about the English and the French, and more specifically about the English in France. About half of them are historical: in one, an English cricket team prepares to play in France in 1789, while the revolution breaks; another is about the building of the Rouen-Paris-Le Havre railway line in the 1840s. This interests Barnes because the line was largely built by English navvies. The story generates a collision between the opposition of scientific triumphalism (the railway) and religious fundamentalism (a local curé's belief that the line is preparing not the way of French travellers but the way of the Lord). Barnes nicely points up the vulnerability of each position, as you would expect. The book's final story, "Tunnel", is about an "elderly English gentleman" who is taking the Eurostar shuttle in the year 2015. He meditates on most of the themes and some of the situations of the book's preceding stories. The story ends with a lunge of the explicit: "And the elderly English gentleman, when he returned home, began to write the stories you have just read." Perhaps Barnes imagines he is pulling the drawstring of his soft bag tight; but the bag has been snapped shut from the beginning.

All of Barnes's talents and limitations are to be seen in his story, "Experiment." Its *donnée* is wonderful: a nephew tells us about his Uncle Freddy, who as a young man in Paris in 1928 once participated in the Surrealist Group's researches into sexuality. The bluff Englishman sitting next to André Breton and Raymond Queneau, and being made to surrender his English common sense in favour of discussing masturbation and anal sex, is original, and offers limitless possibilities.

But its weakness is precisely that it offers limitless possibilities — it is a revolving conceit rather than a grasped truth. And it obstinately remains an idea rather than a truth because Uncle Freddy never becomes more than a stereotype of the Uncle-as-bore, a whisky-drinking anecdotalist, as obvious and conventional as his name. Uncle Freddy is fond of things like: "Thereby hangs a tale, my boy, and it's one I've never told a living soul." Barnes appears to be as embarrassed as the reader about this, because he has his narrator apologise for Uncle Freddy's lack of quiddity: "My uncle was not just an old bore, but a parody of an old bore. Why didn't he strap on a peg-leg and start capering round some inglenooked pub waving a clay pipe? 'Thereby hangs a tale, and it's one I've never told a living soul.' People don't say that any more. Except my uncle just had."

This is characteristically Barnesian in its jauntiness ("some inglenooked pub") and its confident stroking of the known. But it will not do: Freddy is a parody because Barnes has made him so, and apologising for it does not obscure the fact that, under a different writer, Uncle Freddy might be an old bore without being a parody of one. And why *is* Uncle Freddy a parody? Because Barnes sees his boringness only through cliché ("Why didn't he strap on a peg-leg . . ."). Uncle Freddy's insubstantiality drains the story of its pathos, even though Barnes moves towards an almost-affecting conclusion, and turns it into a game. He does to the story what his nephew thinks he should do: he turns "Experiment" into a peg-legged caper.



Julian Barnes: excels at the 'primness of truth' PHOTO: STEVE PYKE

BARNES almost escapes his own tendencies in his two best stories, "Hermitage" (a lovely tale about two sisters who take over a Médoc vineyard in the 1890s) and "Evermore".

The latter is about Miss Moss, a woman who has spent her life mourning her brother, a victim of the first world war. She makes obsessive trips to the military cemetery in France where he is buried. The story is reminiscent of Kipling's two stories on a similar theme, "The Gardener" and "Mary Postgate", and amounts to a gentle, if unwitting, pastiche. Where Kipling neurotically omits, Barnes neurotically over-supplies.

Proceeding by suggestion and indirection, Kipling leaves the reader to decipher his distractions. Barnes's story, by contrast, is devoted to Miss Moss's obsession; it is themed around it. It is a triumph of accretion, while Kipling's story is a triumph of subtraction. Barnes's story is powerful, but it is a literalisation of the theme of remembrance. Indeed, it becomes a manifesto: "If this [forgetting the first world war] happened to the individual, could it not also happen on a national scale?", Barnes asks at the end of the story.

Miss Moss is a lexicographer for the OED (a job Barnes himself once did). She is fastidious, and uses her powers of accuracy to harass the tiniest lapses by the War Graves Commission. She is a fuller figure than anyone else in this book, but she is also a cliché, if one sensitively done. It would be more interesting to encounter a proof-reader who was careless, an Uncle Freddy who was tongue-tied. One wants Barnes to push against himself. In his last story he produces a wonderful phrase: "the primness of truth". A writer capable of the surprise of such a phrase should also be capable of going beyond the primness of truth. For if the truth is prim, then — like Barnes's "facts" — it is also formal, precise, strict, and irritatingly unchangeable. Primness is what Barnes is good at; it is time he was bad at it.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

Directions to Servants, by Jonathan Swift (Penguin Syrens, £2.99)

A RATHER savage and — dare one say — politically incorrect attack on the serving classes of the 18th century. Occasioned, one suspects, by direct and bitter experience; you might begin to understand what was meant by the term "the servant problem". A hilarious catalogue of drunkenness, slackness, petty thievery, and generally annoying behaviour: "When you wait behind a Chair at Meals, keep constantly wriggling the Back of the Chair, that the person behind whom you stand may know you are ready to attend him."

Letters, by Kenneth Tynan, ed Kathleen Tynan (Minerva, £12.99)

A COLLECTION worth making and reading. Tynan might have had his faults: mucking Beckett about, taking Peter Shaffer seriously; and, of course, inordinate self-regard. This last isn't necessarily a fault in a writer, and it translated into an incapability to write a dull sentence. Buy this, and salute the man who first said "f***" on the telly (although for some reason I'm not allowed to say it in the Guardian).

M. William Shakspeare: His true Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King LEAR and his three daughters, ed Graham Holderness (Harvester Wheatsheaf, £5.95)

KING LEAR, in other words, as it was originally printed in the First Quarto. One of a series which will reprint all the Q1 texts, with original spelling, stage directions, and even pagination intact. An excellent idea, superbly executed, which doesn't obscure, but rather accentuates, the flavour of the language. The Campaign for Real Shakespeare starts here.

Collected Poems, by Séan Rafferty (Carcanet, £12.95)

THAT no one has heard of Rafferty is an indictment of the state of poetry in Britain. I hadn't: so this collection has struck me with the force of revelation. He writes with precision and delicately applied force: simple language, taut prosody expertly manipulated to produce a poetry that is at the same time completely familiar and completely original. One complete poem: "I saw her sleeping. See her, saints, tonight/across the undreamed of darkness safe to light./Make her no changeling in the changing night." Although this doesn't give the full picture of how he manages (like, say, Pound; you can trace a modernist lineage in his verse) a range of tones within a single voice.

A brief tirade against the Bolshevik menace

Jonathan Steele

A Concise History of the Russian Revolution
by Richard Pipes
Harvill Press 432pp £25

FOUR years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is becoming increasingly clear that the West's suspicions of Russia have not died with communism.

Richard Pipes first major book, Russia Under The Old Regime, established him 20 years ago as an authority on dictatorship, Russian-style. He called tsarism a "patrimonial regime" and analysed the way a single entity, in this case the royal household, not only controlled but virtually owned the entire state, leaving little space for private property. Although Pipes over-emphasised the political passivity of the peasantry, his anatomy of 19th century tsarism suggested obvious parallels with Soviet rule.

In his subsequent work on the first decade and a half of this century, Pipes rejected the common claim that Russia was on the way to becoming a capitalist democracy when the Bolsheviks struck. He argued that the tsar never allowed the Duma to become a genuine parliament and that Stolypin's attempt to make independent private peasants the centrepiece of agriculture was a failure.

With this sober view of tsarism, Pipes would have been on strong ground to analyse how relatively small a break with the past the October revolution turned out in practice to be. Unfortunately, Pipes ducked it.

Pipes left his chair at Harvard and joined the Reagan White House as the National Security Council's director of Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His recent books, The Russian Revolution 1899-1919 and Russia Under The Bolshevik Regime, have the ideological hallmarks of a man who could have coined the phrase "Evil Empire".

He takes issue with the whole European Enlightenment: "Communism failed because it proceeded from the erroneous doctrine of the Enlightenment, perhaps the most pernicious idea in the history of thought, that man is merely a material compound, devoid of either soul or innate ideas."

In a particularly wild passage, he writes: "Lenin hated whomever he perceived as the bourgeoisie with a destructive passion that fully equalled Hitler's hatred of the Jews; nothing short of their total annihilation would satisfy him," His own analysis refutes this on another page, when he reports that most of the senior tsarist bureaucracy stayed on at their posts since the Bolsheviks needed their skills.

If those two earlier books are history as polemic, his latest one is history as tirade. Though largely a précis of the main two volumes, it was written when the Soviet collapse was already a matter of record and contains his thoughts on this momentous event. The fact that the enemy is a corpse has not eased his emotions. The book is more extreme. It is a pity, since buried in the bile his final reflections admit briefly that "a comparison of tsarist rule at its zenith with the communist regime as it looked by the time of Lenin's death reveals remarkable affinities". Professor Pipes's successors will have to pick up the baton in a calmer spirit.



Time out . . . A pair of clock collectors photographed by Tom Stuttard in 1959. Eccentricity has become a mark of Englishness for writers who spend most of their time apologising for their country

The odd cheer for England

Elizabeth Winter

Writing Englishness 1900-1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity ed Judy Giles and Tim Middleton
Routledge 304pp £40 hbk
£13.99 pbk

Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History
ed Alexander Grant and Keith J Stringer
Routledge 310pp £25

I ONCE conducted a piece of amateur research into the use of the word "English" by post-war British novelists. No doubt my approach was dangerously unscientific — I simply read 30 or 40 novels of the period and noted their contents — but the results were so uniform as to suggest a wider pattern. Predictably no one — a few rightwing sentimentalists excepted — used the word in a positive sense. Throughout, "English" featured as a form of shorthand for inhibition, reticence, repression, reserve and hypocrisy. There were "English handshakers" (limp, unreliable), even at one point an "English sun" (feeble, unwarming). With writers such as A S Byatt, the urge to address England and "Englishness" became an almost congenital tic: "The English are. . .", "The English say . . ." and so on. In general, the fact of one's nationality and the attitudes it might prompt the bearer to hold were seen as a kind of shameful caste-mark to be uncovered and pored over every so often in the hope of explaining certain disagreeable things about one's temperament.

The idea that writers should spend most of their time apologising for their country of origin is a fairly recent one. Early Victorian novelists such as Dickens and Thackeray, whatever they might think about the evils of the mid-19th century, were in no doubt that God — to use the title of a much later novel by R F Delderfield — was an Englishman. To someone like Dickens, a member of what Orwell shrewdly calls "the non-military middle classes", "English", if it can be pinned down at all, means kindly, pacific, eccentric, gentle, whimsical. To Thackeray, slightly higher up the social scale, the key adjective is "honest" or even "modest", and there is scarcely a whiff of the xenophobia, the right little tight little island line, that can be observed in English letters later in the century. Despite occasional bouts of Gallophobia — and Waterloo was a recent memory — Thackeray and Dickens don't dislike "foreigners" (in fact, Thackeray remarks somewhere that England has the best tailors and the best brewers but also the greatest rogues), nor are they imperialist in the white-man's-burden sense of their late Victorian successors. The contrast between Dickens and a novelist of a slightly later vintage such as Trollope, whose French characters tend to be called Jacquetenapes and for whom Italy is merely a source of moral contamination, is all too marked.

What happened to the early Victorian view of Englishness and English character? Plainly, some time between the mid-19th and the mid-20th centuries, "English" ceased to be a point in your favour and became a source of acute discomfort and even embarrassment to any self-respecting intellectual observer.

Inevitably, even to talk of England and "Englishness" is to subscribe — consciously or not — to a heavily weighted historical construct. As David Cannadine demonstrates in his contribution to Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer's volume Uniting The Kingdom?: The Making of British History, the version of "British History" peddled by modern Conservatives is not only stolen from the Whig tradition but "little Englander" to the core.

As an introduction to early 20th-century views of "England", Giles and Middleton's compendium ranges fairly wide. There are sections on ideas and identity, domestic and urban England, popular culture and sport, and a splendid detour through "Reactions to Modernism". While contributors take in obvious national guides such as Orwell, Priestley and H B Morton, they also extend to such forgotten but no less welcome commentators as C F G Masterman and J W Robertson-Scott.

For all this eclecticism the enterprise, while feigning objectivity, is incorrigibly biased in favour of what might be called the modern theoretical style. The introduction comes studded with awful warning signs about "the culturally constricted idea of an 'England' which serves certain ideological purposes". English character, wheeled into view before you can say "Rupert Brooke", can inevitably be seen as "the expression of a particular social group who sought to define the national character in their own exclusive terms".

Well, no doubt they did. All the same, it seems slightly depressing to find students — the kind of students who have to have it explained that Brooke's "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" "evokes a set of social relations which would have meant something very different to the female domestic servants who might have supplied the tea to a male Cambridge undergraduate" — presented not so much with food for thought as cooking instructions as well.

This kind of analysis is as charmless as Mr Gradgrind, and nearly as unreliable. In fact, the editorial introductions in Writing Englishness are a high old example of ideological interest masquerading as objectivity. Though a preference is never stated in so many words, the reader is never in any doubt that the editors prefer Virginia Woolf's analysis of spinster England to the Newbolt Report's patrician laments about adult reading habits, and it is significant that Orwell's essay on "Boy's Weeklies" (rightwing newspaper magnates perverting juvenile tastes) gets excerpted, but not Frank Richard's equally incisive reply.

Nevertheless, this is a revealing book. What it demonstrates above all is the extent to which, even by the beginning of the 20th century, "Englishness" had become sentimentalised. As the editors imply, right and left were guilty, and Orwell's England Your England is in many ways quite as unreal as the "Merrie England" retreads from the farther bank of the political divide. No Victorian politician could have uttered the platitudes offered up by Stanley Baldwin to a public gathering in 1924 ("The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil" etc). Not only would he have known them to be untrue; he would have thought them unnecessary. In retrospect, it becomes clear that politicians only harp on national identity when it is in some way threatened, and — sure enough — the book's blurb contains a reference to John Major's recent evocations of cricket and warm beer.

THE MESSAGE to be decoded from Giles and Middleton's editorial work is the familiar message of post-war leftwing history. Relativism is all; one point of view is as good as another; there is no majority, simply a mass of minorities jostling for precedence. Above all is the refusal to admit the existence of an inclusive national interest. One sees this in the excerpt covering George V's Silver Jubilee of 1935: Philip Gibbs puffing about "individualism" and plainly meant to seem ridiculous. But the Silver Jubilee was an outpouring of popular sentiment, which took officialdom largely by surprise.

Even odder was the combination of royalist with radical sentiment. Observers noted that there were a great many variations on "Long Live The King, Down With The Landlord". It would be difficult for this to happen, you feel, in a country where national sentiment really was manufactured by a cynical élite and patriotism was just a middle-class stimulant.

In their introduction, Giles and Middleton talk of the difficulty of defining a "modern image of Englishness which is not in some way negative". Where did this negativity come from? The answer lies in the left's almost complete domination of intellectual culture in the post-war era. Even now, we are still a rightwing country with a leftwing mind.

One of the strengths of New Labour is its awareness that flag-waving is not the exclusive property of the right. Tony Blair may have his failings but he will never be found singing the national anthem between clenched teeth.

Bazza's swipe at the acquisitive society

Robert Potts

Women in the Background
by Barry Humphries
Heinemann 326pp £14.99

BARRY HUMPHRIES carefully warns readers against seeing his first novel as a *roman-à-clef*, and perhaps with good reason. His hero, Derek Pettyfer, is a successful, dried-out, Australian expat comedian in his 50s, and a TV star in more ways than one; his most popular creation is Mrs Petty, a puritanical Adelaide housewife. Since Humphries is most famous for his double life as Dame Edna Everage, his novel's swipes at the glitterati are bound to cause a few twitches; but this is, apparently, poison in jest, and no offence in the world.

The backdrop on which Humphries's satirical sallies are daubed is Derek Pettyfer's inexorable nemesis, which the reader sees coming some time before the hapless protagonist does. Pettyfer, once a boozy sybarite, is on the wagon and on his own when he is fixed up with a girlfriend, Pam — one of the many "women in the background" whose names are the titles of the chapters of this entertaining comedy. The foreground, for Pettyfer, is his Beautiful Flat and his beautiful *objets d'art* — Piranesi paintings and Roman glass, which he views, incorrectly, as more reliable than human beings.

Pettyfer is being pursued by an obituarist Kenneth Grocock (pronounced Gro-Co, who comes not to praise his subject but to bury him alive. Kenneth has aspirations to write a salacious biography rather than wait for Derek to hop the twig. These attempts to dig dirt come good, but at a cost, and by the end Gro-Co is cheerfully knocking out obituaries at a rate of knots for people whose demises he has tangentially caused. Meanwhile, Derek and the members of his milieu are stripped of everything they hold dear: property, status, money, even their lives.

For Derek's failing — his focus on possessions rather than people — is identified as the tragic myopia which enables him to be hoodwinked and shanghaied. Nearly every other ludicrous character in the novel is also undone by acquisitive urges. Pam, a parvenu sculptress from Birmingham, is seduced by the celebrity life-style, and sleeps and sculpts her way through the cast; Derek's former agent, Woody Weinglass, collects Christmas kitsch but is torched in his grotto; a fabulous duo of gay dentists who collect celebrity patients and photograph their etherised figures are eventually socially disgraced.

When Derek observes that "collections could entrap their collectors," he is only half right; these metonyms of consumption end up consuming their owners in sundry dramatic ways. The epigraph to the book — "when people have been more than usually disappointing, we turn with an added tenderness to things" — explains Derek's perspective, allowing for the surprisingly tender epilogue which neatly inverts the last line of The Great Gatsby and offers a little, if late, redemption. But acquisition throughout is seen as a snobbish game, in which every collection stands in for money or status; and it is no surprise that Derek is done for by the purest collectors of all, the agents of the Inland Revenue.

Those characters who escape mutilation or death are not spared Humphries's sadistically accurate barbs: the dismal Sloane caterer, who recurs throughout with her nightmarish fricassee of hare, is described as "like Fergie, but upper class"; it is said of Derek's first wife that "being painted by Francis Bacon had turned out to be a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy".

Humphries's style is hammishly literary — "sesquipedalian" as he disarmingly and perfectly points out — and the running gags are in some cases gratuitously crowbarred into the plot. But this sassy, self-deprecating first novel contains more than enough good lines to keep the reader perversely cheerful unto the inevitable catastrophes.

Fire and brimstone

Paul Evans



ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

THE Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire has the dubious honour of being the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. Dubious because the real legacy of all that achievement is something they thought would vanish into thin air: pollution.

At the entrance to the Gorge, between the medieval abbey at Buildwas and the hanging woods of Benthall Edge, is Ironbridge power station. This is a coal-burner that was built when the theory was that if you had a tall enough chimney you could dump the toxic emissions into the limitless bucket of the atmosphere. Unfortunately what goes up must come down, and the sulphur from burning coal comes down as acid rain. A scientific report released this month includes a league table of acid rain producers in Britain, and Ironbridge power station is one of the "filthy few".

The report reveals it's not just the quantity of sulphur thrown out that matters, but where the source of pollution is situated. Although this particular power station is not one of the biggest polluters, its geographic position in the west of the country means that south-westerly winds blow its sulphurous breath to ecologically sensitive areas, particularly the uplands. In Britain, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are protected by statute because they contain the best examples of wildlife habitats and native species. In recent years SSSIs have taken a hammering from development, new roads and insensitive management practices, but little has been understood about the damage to these important habitats from atmospheric pollution.

The latest report reveals the stark truth: in England 38 per cent of SSSIs get more acid rain than they can cope with and in Wales the figure is 60 per cent.

The vulnerability of these important ecological sites can only be measured by the soil's capacity to weather naturally and counteract the effects of acidification. Many soils, particularly those already slightly acid, are fighting a losing battle and no one seems sure what the long-term effects will be.

What's even more worrying is that the biological components of the soil don't seem to figure in the assessment of damage. "Too expensive to research," I was told by one scientist involved in the report. While scientists watch their computer models of soil chemistry, the complex web of life is left out in the poisoned rain.

Of course, this in not just a little local problem. Ironbridge is only one of the smoking guns aimed blindly at vulnerable sites in Britain and north-west Europe. Despite all the international agreements and targets for emission control, the acid rain problem is gathering into a storm. I have spoken to eminent scientists who feel that the explosion at Chernobyl pales into insignificance when compared with the Chinese programme of building coal-burning power stations. So what is being done?

Since free-market capitalism is the only deal in town, the UK and other governments, led by the US, want to establish a market for trading in permits to emit sulphur pollution. Under this scheme, owners of "dirty" power stations would have to buy permits from owners of clean ones. What may be cost-effective to economists may not be beneficial in ecological terms.

What this report into vulnerable wildlife habitats shows is that this sort of trading may only transfer large doses of sulphur pollution from one area, where it does little damage, into new areas where it does much more. The legacy is a hard rain indeed.

Bridge Zia Mahmood

I MUST BE getting old, or senile, or both. The other day I forgot the cardinal rule of rubber bridge, first propounded by the great S J Simon in his classic book, Why You Lose At Bridge.

The rule is this: Don't try for the best possible result. Try for the best result possible.

I was playing for the highest stakes I could find, and my lovable partner was the weak link in an otherwise expert table. So I should have known better than to try for perfection in the bidding — I should have settled for the best I could achieve with this particular player.

I picked up this rather pretty hand:

♠AKQJ65 ♥AQ82 ♦K3 ♣4

The bidding started like this:

South	West	North Zia	East
		1♠	No
2 NT(1)	No	3♥(2)	No
3 NT	No	4♣(3)	No
4♥	No	4 NT(4)	No

(1) 13-plus points and a balanced hand. (2) I wanted to ask for aces here, but 4NT would be natural so I temporised. (3) 4NT would still be natural, so I had to make another mark-time bid. (4) I was able to use Blackwood at last.

At this point my partner started thinking and I started feeling sick. It was obvious to the rest of the table that 4NT was Blackwood, but it wasn't obvious to my partner — and it was my job not to give him problems in the auction.

Of course, if he had two aces and two kings we would be cold for 7NT — but that would have represented the best possible result.

The best result possible with this partner was a small slam played by me, and I should have bid six spades an hour ago!

"Please don't pass!" I screamed silently, wondering if there was anything in telepathy after all. Perhaps there was, for my partner did not pass — he emerged from his trance with a bid of 6NT.

Well, I might still make seven spades, but all I wanted to do at this point was get out with a plus score. So I passed, West led the king of clubs. The full deal was as shown below:

North
♠ AKQJ65
♥ AQ82
♦ K3
♣ 4

West
♠ None
♥ 10765
♦ J986
♣ KQJ75

East
♠ 109874
♥ J9
♦ 54
♣ 9862

South
♠ 32
♥ K43
♦ AQ1072
♣ A103

The bad news was that we had missed a grand slam that was close to 98 per cent.

The good news was that we wouldn't have made it, since neither the spades nor the diamonds divided in the hoped-for civilised fashion.

The worst news was that we didn't make 6NT either — South won the opening lead with the ace of clubs, played a spade to the ace, cashed three more spades discarding both his clubs, then tried three rounds of hearts.

When that suit did not break, he fell back on the diamonds — but West had a guard there also and we had to concede one down.

I leave it to the reader to decide in how many ways my partner could actually have made the contract.

I was too busy being furious with myself for allowing this to happen, but my dear old partner brought me back to reality by asking plaintively whether he could have made it.

I could only answer truthfully, if diplomatically: "It was a very tough hand. Nothing broke."

Quick crossword no. 297

Across

1 Sign of stoicism (5,5,3)
8 Peculiar (3)
9 Nightly (9)
10 Risky (8)
11 Heavenly body (4)
13 Gambling place (6)
14 Make out (6)
16 Breaking waves (4)
17 Armed service (3,5)
20 City of shoes and cheese (9)
21 Harass — horse (3)
22 Direction of 292½ degrees (4-5-4)

Down

1 Exclusive story (5)
2 Desperately placed (2,4,7)
3 Subtle distinction (to draw) (4,4)
4 Delivery truck (4-2)
5 Flightless birds (4)
6 Crazy extremists (7,6)
7 Play ref (anag) — old horse (7)
12 Start journey or explain (3,5)
13 It's established by precedents (4,3)
15 Season (6)
18 Number (5)
19 Eager or sharp (4)

Last week's solution

Chess Leonard Barden

DAVID BRONSTEIN, who tied a match for the world championship and won two interzonals, is still a formidable player at age 71 and was joint winner of last year's Hastings Challengers.

Bronstein is a chess legend, most of all for his daring and creativity, as a pioneer of complex openings like the King's Indian and King's Gambit.

His new book, The Sorcerer's Apprentice (Cadogan, £14.99), written in collaboration with Tom Furstenberg, has more than 200 games, interspersed with hints for improvement and anecdotes. It really is an excellent read.

Surprisingly for a political nonconformist whose father spent seven years in the gulag and who was banned from travel to the West after refusing to denounce the exiled Korchnoi, Bronstein praises the old-style Soviet championships as an "intellectual showcase whose participants were expected to demonstrate the beauty of chess art". The tournaments are long gone, but Russian chess education is still the best.

This week's game is an early King's Indian from a 1941 Soviet semi-final which stopped half-way when the Germans invaded. Bronstein's opponent was killed in action a few months later, and the semi-final was replayed in 1944 when Bronstein qualified for the final, beat Botvinnik and began his long career at the top.

S Belavenets-D Bronstein, Rostov 1941

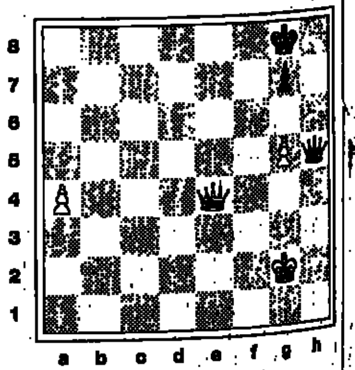
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 Nbd7 5 g3 g6 6 Bg2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 b3 Re8 9 e3 c6 10 Qc2 Qa5 Delaying White's Ba3, but also ready to transfer the Q to f5 or h5 to exploit White's e3/g3 pawn formation.

11 a4 Nf8 12 Ba3 Bf5 13 Qb2 Rad8 14 Rfd1 e4 15 Nd2 Ne6 16 b4 Qc7 17 Rdb1 Qd7! A classic light-square attack, familiar to any expert from 1960 onwards but pioneering play in 1941.

18 c5 Ng5! Sacrificing the d6 pawn to keep d5 free for his other knight.

19 cxd6 Bh3 20 Bh1 Qf5 21 Ne2 Nd5! 22 b5 If 22 Nf4 Nxf4 23 exf4 e3 24 fxe3 Rxe3 wins, and there is no other defence to Bg4 and Nh3+. **Bg4 23 Kf1 Nxe3+ 24 Ke1 Nf3+ 25 Resigns.**

No 2404



Tigran Petrosian v Boris Gulko, USSR championship, 1975. Queen and pawn endings are hard, and Petrosian (White, to move) was trying to win game and tournament. Pushing either pawn allows the BQ to start checking. What should White play?

No 2403: 1 Rh8+ Kf7 2 Be8+! Nxe8 3 Kg5 and 4 Rf8 mate.

Cricket One-day Internationals: South Africa v England

Tired England stumble at the double

Mike Selvey in Pretoria

ENGLAND produced a dismal, tired performance here in the fourth one-day international and were trounced by seven wickets, their second defeat of the weekend after a weakened side lost by three wickets in Johannesburg.

South Africa, chasing 273 to win on Sunday on a perfect one-day pitch, paced the match superbly and belied their reputation as falterers when batting second.

There was little between the sides after 30 overs. But an opening partnership of 156 between Andrew Hudson (72) and Gary Kirsten was followed by a stand of 67 between Kirsten and Hansie Cronje before Kirsten was bowled off his pads for a brilliant 116, from only 125 balls.

Cronje tried to complete the proceedings in style but was caught by Graham Thorpe at wide long-on for 47 in attempting to reach his half-century with his third six; he nearly succeeded, too, as Wilf Diedricks signalled a six, believing Thorpe's foot had strayed over the boundary, but Thorpe — sweet revenge — immediately called for the third umpire. Diedricks duly signalled for the TV replay and Cronje, who had engineered Thorpe's run-out in the final Test at Newlands by demanding a replay, was given out.

No matter: Daryll Cullinan struck 25 and Jacques Kallis 14, and they were still together with two overs left when Kallis drove the winning boundary through extra cover.

Earlier, England had failed to capitalise on their own century opening stand. That had come inside 23 overs from Robin Smith (63) and Alec Stewart (64), captain in the absence of Mike Atherton — who was no doubt still stunned by his dismissal off his first ball on Saturday. Until Jack Russell's wonderfully inventive 39 from 19 balls, no one was able to maintain the opening tempo, let alone raise it.

Although neither Allan Donald nor Dominic Cork bowled intelligently, when the two most vibrant bowlers of the Test series are hit for 72 and 65 runs respectively from their 10 overs each, clearly it is a batsman's game. So if it was England's bowlers who were at fault in Saturday's defeat, letting South Africa out of jail when containment was essential, it was their batsmen who were negligent here.

Nowhere near sufficient runs were scored. Both Stewart and Smith, for instance, responded to the pace in the pitch and batted easily. But instead of capitalising, Stewart swept Pat Symcox, an innocuous off-spinner, gently to square leg and Smith mistimed the first ball of a new spell from Donald to mid-off when he might have had a gander first. One or both men should have played the match's definitive innings.

So too might Graeme Hick, who, unusually, is not making the most of a streak of form that could reduce any attack to rubble in these games. Two effortless sixes were followed by an inelegant swipe to leg and he lost his off stump. No side can expect to be profligate like that and succeed.

THE WEEKEND of defeat — on Saturday England made 198 for 8 — sees England start in Durban needing to win all three remaining matches to take the series. Some hope: this South Africa side are gaining momentum as the World Cup looms and their bowling will lose nothing by the return of Fanie de Villiers for the last three matches.

In the first one-day international at Cape Town, played on January 9, South Africa beat England by six runs. The home side finished on 211 for 8 and England looked capable of overhauling that total until Donald and Shaun Pollock entered the attack. Donald took three wickets and man-of-the-match Pollock four as the visitors were all out for 205 with Thorpe making a determined effort to save the match by scoring 62.

Atherton and Thorpe were England's heroes in the second match, on January 11, as they guided their side to a five-wicket victory after South Africa had made 262 for 8. Thorpe finished on 72no while Atherton hit 85 as South Africa's total was overhauled with a comfortable nine balls to spare at Bloemfontein. Graeme Hick contributed 55 to the total.

● Devon Malcolm, England's Jamaica-born fast bowler, was at the centre of a row with Ray Illingworth this week after bringing colour into the controversy and accusing the England manager of destroying his confidence. Malcolm now faces disciplinary proceedings and possibly a fine.

Tennis

Agassi given a big fright

DEFENDING champion Andre Agassi twice came to within two points of crashing out of the Australian Open in Melbourne on the opening day.

The American world No 2 and second seed gave a dour performance littered with errors before finally rallying to beat Argentinian Gaston Etlis 3-6, 7-6 (7-2), 4-6, 7-6 (7-5), 6-3 in a thrilling three-hour, 18-minute Centre Court duel.

Agassi, who admitted he had never heard of Etlis, was hampered by a knee injury sustained when he fell down some stairs at his hotel on Sunday.

And he almost became the second defending Grand Slam champion to lose in the first round to a qualifier as the world No 133 produced an awesome display in his first major tournament.

Roscoe Tanner is the only man in Grand Slam history to have gone out in the first round while defending his title — at the Australian Open in 1977 — and Agassi looked to be following him as Etlis served for the match at 5-3 in the fourth set before leading the subsequent tie-break 5-3 only for his nerve to fail.

Agassi, who wore a thick bandage around his right knee, said later: "I had trouble pushing off entirely in either direction. I basically couldn't jump off the mark. That's why he would have the nerve to hit so many drop shots. He did what he did well, keeping me moving and dropping in shots. But he couldn't finish it off. Finishing it often is the most difficult part."

At the Peters International Tournament in Sydney on Sunday, joint world No 1 Monica Seles won her second tournament since her return to tennis last August when she defeated fellow American Lindsay Davenport 4-6, 7-6 (9-7), 6-3 in a gruelling 134-minute, three-set final.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Magpies shot down

LEAGUE leaders Newcastle United's hopes of a domestic treble were shot down by Arsenal when the London club knocked them out of the Coca-Cola Cup in the quarter-finals at Highbury. Ian Wright scored two stunning goals. The first came with a ferocious drive which wrong-footed Newcastle keeper Pavel Srnicek.

The visitors' problems were compounded when their enigmatic French midfielder David Ginola received the red card for an off-the-ball clash with Lee Dixon on 67 minutes. Wright then got the second with a clinical header to complete a night of misery for the Magpies.

In the semi-final, Arsenal will meet Aston Villa, who defeated Wolverhampton Wanderers 1-0 in a frenetic Midlands derby. Tommy Johnson was Villa's hero when, midway through the second half, he poked the ball home off Wolves' keeper Mike Stowell's knee from a pinpoint cross from Gary Charles.

In their clash with Reading, Leeds staged a comeback to reach the last four for the first time since 1991. Jimmy Quinn fired First Division Reading ahead after 17 minutes, but Phil Masinga grabbed his first goal for nearly a year to level the tie in the 35th minute. Gary Speed put the home side in front with a neat header just before half-time.

The fourth quarter-final between Norwich and Birmingham ended in a 1-1 draw.

UEFA has banned Tottenham Hotspur and Wimbledon from European competition for a year as further punishment for fielding below-strength teams in last summer's Intertoto Cup. Uefa has already docked English clubs a Uefa Cup place and also withheld appearance money from Spurs and Wimbledon. Both clubs are to appeal against the latest decision.



Bird: giving himself out

DICKIE BIRD, the most human and accessible of cricket umpires, is to retire from international duties after the Lord's Test between England and India in June. The 62-year-old (pictured above) is the world's most experienced umpire, having stood in 65 Test and 92 one-day internationals, including three World Cup finals.

He played county cricket for Yorkshire and Leicestershire from 1956 to 1964 and was awarded the MBE in 1986. "A five-day Test match is much harder work now. You get tired and you are under the continual eye of the media," Bird said. "The time has come to give somebody else the chance."

THE old firm of Desmond Haynes and Gordon Greenidge hit back with an opening stand of 137 as West Indies retained the World Masters Series title and collected the £33,000 first prize in Sharjah. Mike Gatting's England side lost by eight wickets after making 163 for seven. India defeated Pakistan by three wickets for third place in the "seniors" tournament.

ENGLISH Rugby Union lost one of its most famous names when Harlequins sold it off to a Japanese electronics company in a three-year £1.5 million "partnership". After 130 years of exclusivity, the club will be known as NEC Harlequins of London next season.

HENRY WHARTON retained his European super-middleweight title by stopping Italy's Vincenzo Nardiello in Halifax. The Yorkshireman suffered the first knockdown of his career when he was floored in the third round. But he bounced back, and in the sixth round sprinted from his corner to catch Nardiello cold as the Italian was still getting up. Nardiello suffered a cut eye and the referee ended the fight.

In Manchester, Ensley Bingham took the vacant British light-middleweight title when he left Gilbert Jackson out on his feet in the third round of their clash.

MARK BLUNDELL has switched from Formula One to IndyCar after failing to secure a grand prix drive for 1996 with Sauber-Ford. The 29-year-old Briton has signed for the PacWest Racing Group to compete in the World Series.

GUNTHER MADER at last won his first World Cup downhill, and he did it in some style. The Austrian, who had triumphed in every discipline except downhill, set a course record of 1min 54.29sec at Streif in Kitzbuhel, Austria.

BRITAIN'S Diane Modahl has cleared another hurdle in her campaign to prove herself innocent of taking drugs. The International Amateur Athletic Federation said the former Commonwealth 800-metre champion is eligible to compete again. A final clearance is expected from a three-strong arbitration panel within the next two months.

Venables quits to fight Sugar in the courts

John Duncan

TERRY VENABLES announced last week that he will quit as England coach after the 1996 European Championships to concentrate on his legal fight with the Tottenham chairman, Alan Sugar.

"The Football Association is deeply disappointed by his decision," said a terse statement read out by the FA spokesman, David Davies, at a hastily arranged press conference, "but we understand the thinking behind it. Terry Venables faces a number of time-consuming legal battles in the latter part of 1996 which he believes could interfere with England's efforts to qualify for the final stages of the next World Cup. He is absolutely determined to clear his name."

Venables later confirmed the reasons for his departure, focusing on the October court case in which he is being sued by Sugar over allegations in Venables's autobiography. The date of the case was switched to after Euro '96 in June after an appeal to Sugar by the FA chairman, Sir Bert Millichip.

"I felt that in the circumstances it would be better after Euro '96 when my contract comes to an end that that would be it," said Venables. "I felt that what I've got ahead could be problematical. We would have a World Cup qualifying game around October or November and I could be in court for several weeks."

The FA said that Venables first told them of his decision in Birmingham on December 16, the day before the draw for Euro '96 took place there. "He was urged to think again," said Mr Davies. "He told Graham Kelly [the FA chief executive] that his decision was unchanged."

Venables was given a two-year contract in 1994. He was an almost unanimous selection, but concerns were expressed at the time that Venables's feud with the Tottenham chairman and the allegations about his business affairs made in two BBC Panorama programmes would affect his ability to do the job.

Venables's departure is a humiliating blow for the FA who had hoped to begin a new era of continuity with Venables.

Austin



